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EURIPIDES

THE BACCHAE AND OTHER PLAYS

ION

THE WOMEN OF TROY

HELEN

THE BACCHAE

*

TRANSLATED BY PHILIP VELLACOTT

PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex

U.S.A. : Penguin Books Inc., 3300 Clipper Mill Road, Baltimore 11, Md
[*Educational Representative:*
D. C. Heath & Co., 285 Columbus Avenue, Boston 16, Mass]

CANADA : Penguin Books (Canada) Ltd, 47 Green Street,
Saint Lambert, Montreal, P.Q.

AUSTRALIA : Penguin Books Pty Ltd, 762 Whitehorse Road,
Mitcham, Victoria

SOUTH AFRICA : Penguin Books (S.A.) Pty Ltd, Gibraltar House,
Regents Road, Sea Point, Cape Town

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Made and printed in Great Britain
by The Whitefriars Press Ltd, Tonbridge

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This translation first published 1954

The terms for the performance of these plays
may be obtained from The League of Dramatists,
84 Drayton Gardens, London SW10,
to whom all applications for permission
should be made

882.3
E89BG

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INTRODUCTION

THE four plays in this volume are arranged in the probable order of their production at Athens; and this order is also, as it were, symphonically suitable, providing a sequence of Allegro, Andante Maestoso, Scherzo, and Finale.

Three of them, *Ion*, *Helen*, and *The Bacchae*, are plays whose general interpretation has been the subject of much scholarly dispute; in *The Women of Troy* I have suggested in one important scene a view which differs from that usually accepted; and it is likely that here and there a word or phrase in the translation has been influenced by my own feeling about the play. If in my introductory remarks I put forward somewhat arbitrarily the view which I accept, I shall try also to make the problem itself seem interesting enough to persuade at least an occasional reader to weigh in his own mind the accepted evidence and to read further in search of evidence hitherto unnoticed.

For it has been too often assumed that understanding of the main works of Classical literature is now complete. It is an encouraging fact that perhaps the greatest of Euripides' plays, *The Bacchae*, has within the last few years been given, for the first time in English, as far as I am aware, a thorough and satisfying exegesis – fortunately in a most accessible form even for the reader with no Greek.* The ashes of A. W. Verrall's work, cremated in the fire of modern criticism, are still being sifted over; and it is becoming clear that the refutation of his views has at times been vitiated by the same enthusiastic excess which discredited some of his valuable perceptions. So I would beg the reader who comes fresh to Euripides not to feel in any way that he treads by sufferance on ground already surveyed, mined, and recorded to the last cubic inch; but rather to feel he is entering a world whose mysteries are infinite because they are the simple ones of common human experience; whose life and language offer a touchstone for the vitality of our modern world.

I

The first play, *Ion*, throws us straight into the whirlpool of controversy. Is Euripides denouncing Apollo? If so, for what crime – lust, or lies, or both? Or does he assume that in any case no one believes in

* *Euripides and Dionysus*, by R. P. Winnington-Ingram.

Apollo, and content himself with denouncing the institution of th Delphic Oracle? Above all, does he expect his audience to assume t the end of the play that Ion is in fact Creusa's son? Or that he is th son of some Delphian girl, by Xuthus or any other young brave wh visited Delphi at about the same time? In short, is the highly equivoc ending a happy or a tragic one?

I think the solution lies in a proper understanding of the two chi characters, and particularly of Ion. One of the high points of interes in this play is that it shows a distinct development of its chief characte in the course of the action – a feature which in many Greek plays precluded by the convention of building a whole play round a singl central deed. Ion first appears as boyish, humbly pious, content an kind-hearted. His sympathy quickly responds to Creusa's sad tale; hi piety equally quickly perceives the impossibility of pressing Apoll for an answer he did not want to give. In his soliloquy after Creusa an Xuthus have gone out, he shows clearly that he has always accepted a pleasant myths the promiscuous loves of the gods; but that it is severe shock to meet for the first time the personal story of a huma victim, for whom the consequences have proved less pleasant. H concludes that 'the gods are to be blamed' for their behaviour; h does not take the further step of saying, 'If the gods do evil they ar not gods' – a fragment from an unknown play; but he has at least be gun the painful process of growing up, of reconciling religious faith with the facts of human life. By this beginning he has immediately wo the interest of his audience, who lived in an age which presente every naturally religious mind with the same problem. By the time o Euripides it was for educated Athenians no longer a question of be lieving or disbelieving in myths or miracles – that question th Athenian intellect could settle for itself. But the uneasiness of super stition survives the victory of intellect – Thucydides is full of examples And further, the same intellect which rejected supernatural inter ference in mundane events could, and often did, in both personal an political complications, use a hard-dying superstition for disingenuou ends; precisely as Creusa, with belief and determination nicely mixed offers Ion pious but quibbling explanations which he cannot for moment accept. Against this corruption the only hopeful defence is a individual integrity either in oneself or in someone else; and it is thi integrity which Ion shows strongly from the outset, by which h

claims the alliance of the intelligent in the audience, and dominates the play.

Before leaving this first scene we must note several remarks of Ion which show how closely integrity and intelligence combine in his search for the truth. His immediate reaction to the story of Apollo's rape is, 'Nonsense! Of course it was a man.' The unhappiness of the experience is for him proof presumptive that the lover was no god. When he sums up the discussion he says, '*If* it were proved that Apollo had behaved so badly ...' – in no way committing himself to believe Creusa's story. If that story were true there would, he implies, be other details unknown to Creusa, facts essential to any judgement, without which to accuse the god would be folly.

Yet he is shaken. His soliloquy is an absolutely genuine soliloquy – it is, I think, bad criticism to say, as a standard modern edition says, that here 'the pious young votary of Phoebus becomes the mouthpiece of Euripidean views, hardly appropriate to his character or office.' What Ion says is, 'I must take Apollo to task.' It is a thought which rises spontaneously from the situation he has just been faced with; a thought which in real life would be too daring to utter aloud, but on the stage must find plain words. This is not the voice of Euripides; it is the voice of the whole of that suffering, venturing, relentlessly thinking generation for whom Euripides wrote, for whom Ion stands. It is entirely in character that he recognizes this spontaneous heresy in his own mind, is neither afraid of it nor at the mercy of it, but sets it fairly in sight beside his orthodoxy for consideration.

Next comes his interview with Xuthus. He does not take to Xuthus, whose brusque and business-like tone has already suggested what his later behaviour confirms, that he is a hard-boiled egoist. (It is *not* uncommon for adolescent boys to dislike uncongenial middle-aged men, even if they are their fathers; or to be attracted by sympathetic middle-aged women, even if they are not their mothers – both which assumptions have been made by those who hold the traditional view, that Ion is Creusa's son by Apollo.) But the conversation is a disturbing one for Ion, and excitement leads him now to express to another what hitherto he has expressed only to himself – his growing scepticism about mythical origins. 'Another child of the earth!' And Xuthus says plainly, 'The earth doesn't bear children' – and there, without question, speaks for the whole audience; reminding us at the

same time that in a few minutes we shall be confronted again with a woman who really believes that her grandfather was born in that picturesque manner. The rest of what passes between Xuthus and Ion makes it finally clear that, whether Ion is Xuthus's son or not, he is almost certainly the son of some visitor to the Bacchic mysteries; indeed we surmise that there must have been an annual crop of chance babies, most of them reared at home by their young mothers. Naturally Ion is not enthusiastic over the discovery.

Then in a long speech to Xuthus he shows that he has made good use of the opportunities that temple life has given him both for acquiring information and for reflecting upon it. He has considered public life and decided that he does not want it. The public life he describes belongs, of course, as much to the fifth century as his whole character and problem. Euripides himself, it seems, was by prevailing standards a bad citizen, and neglected democratic responsibilities for pursuits whose exercise seemed to him more urgent; and no doubt many young Athenians would have done the same, but were overridden by parental authority – as now Xuthus overrides Ion; and ultimately threw themselves into the swim with as ready a zest as Ion now shows, suddenly resolving to co-operate, accept his father's will, and change Delphi for Athens, boyhood for manhood, with adventurous courage and a bumper feast.

He is off the stage for some time. The long scene between Creusa and her old slave, with Creusa's monody in the middle, illustrates meanwhile the new world which Ion has to enter; a world of hope deferred, self-deception, lust and murder. The plot against Ion is laid. And now his re-appearance is further suspended while we are given a vivid description of him in his new role, of the development his new prospects have already caused in a mind whose maturity, delayed by the sheltered temple life, now suddenly bursts from the bud. The modest temple-sweeper and servant of all comers now organizes bands of workmen to build a palace in an hour, marshals guests by hundreds and presides at their feasting; detects the plot, seizes the criminal, breaks up the banquet, hustles the high court of Delphi, and roars through the town to the temple with an armed rabble at his heels.

Euripides would not spare the nauseous cruelty of admirable young men. Ion had excuse enough – as Hippolytus had for his behaviour to Phaedra; but, like Hippolytus, hits out at a trapped woman with an

un-Hellenic savagery. 'Let the crags comb out her dainty hair!' The over-excitement of this day has upset his balance. He recovers it, however, as soon as the priestess appears; and is ready with all his warmth of response when Creusa convinces him – how ready to be convinced, he has told us himself – that she is his mother.

But Ion is now a man; and honesty gives his extreme youth unconditional authority. As earlier he had to catechize Xuthus about his past indiscretions, so now he has to try to help Creusa to know herself. He puts it to her that her seducer was not Apollo but a man (Verrall says, a 'ruffian' – surely unnecessarily; Athenians knew as well as law-courts to-day the practical difficulty of defining rape). Creusa bolsters her asseveration with an excited oath whose effect is less to confirm than to cancel; for, after all, which is easier to believe in, Apollo's epiphany by the Long Rocks or Athene's battle with the Giants? Creusa is trying to prove King Arthur on Merlin's evidence. In short, Ion's question and Creusa's reply leave no doubt that if Creusa continues to believe in her divine lover she has no one to share her belief, either on the stage or in the audience.

Finally, when Creusa on Apollo's behalf explains the superior value of expediency over truth, Ion shows that his religious faith is moving away from conventions towards its true object. He now resolves to do what in the opening scene he had forbidden as impious. 'I will ask Apollo himself whose son I am.' It is Apollo or the truth; and if they do not tally, it is the truth. This is the crisis of the spiritual pilgrimage of youth in every vital civilization. Apollo does not stand for religion, but for institution. Delphi in the fifth century was not merely an oracle hostile to Athens; it was institution in every sense – wealth, power, caste, intrigue, tradition; everything that the adventurous spirit hates. In one way this was fortunate; for men could hate and reject it without feeling that they were hating or rejecting religion. So Ion reaches his crisis and strides to the temple door. But before his challenge is uttered Apollo retires from the contest; and Athene appears, as in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, to give his answer.

And that is as far as a play can take the matter. For the answer Athene gives is in fact that same quibble which Creusa has just advanced, and which Ion has rejected as unworthy of his own self-respect – to say nothing of the honour of Apollo. To Creusa this answer seems, for the moment, to provide the one happy ending.

For Creusa never looks beyond the moment. Each successive scene has made more evident the credulity, or rather suggestibility, which has been her character and her curse since the first fatal weakness eighteen years ago. Once she has made up her mind to believe, she pursues belief like a duty. She accepts Athene's fatuous last words as Peleus accepts a comparable utterance from Thetis at the close of *Andromache*.

But Ion has his answer too. It is that he may look for guidance only to the honesty of his own heart. His father is Xuthus or some counterpart of Xuthus – but does that really matter either to Ion or to us? He still has his pity and affection for Creusa; perhaps he is even sorry for Xuthus. But he knows (he has already shown how clearly) what life in Athens will be like; that he is going to a house where within a month the deception of husband by wife, of wife by husband, must inevitably cause an explosion which will make the other disadvantages he has foreseen appear trivial. A little while ago, when the great feast was beginning, he had felt a zest for this dangerous new life. But since then Apollo has vanished; he has lost his home and gained neither father, mother, nor friend; he is alone with his integrity. He will go – not because he must, but because he has no wish to stay.

An interesting point of criticism concerns the last remark in the play before the Chorus-leader's closing lines: 'I take my just and honourable possession.' It is doubtful whether these words belong to Creusa or to Ion. Verrall believes that Ion makes his one speech after Athene, and then remains in gloomy silence to the end. Other editors assume that Ion's reply to Athene shows whole-hearted acceptance, and that he departs happily to his 'just and honourable possession', the throne of Athens. My own view is that Ion's reply to Athene is wholly ironical (he has used irony before); and that if the last line is to be attributed to him it is no less so. To the blatant cynicism of Athene's explanations no honest response can be given; it dominates the whole ending.

This exposition of the play follows in its main points that put forward by Verrall; I think that it is also the view which would ultimately offer itself as the only possible one to a producer preparing this play for the stage. In fact, I have known it confirmed in this way. Verrall, however, spoilt his own case, as he often did, by going too far, and adding in this instance the extravagant and needless suggestion

that the mother of Ion was the Delphian priestess herself; with other details concerning the recognition of the cradle and its contents. In regard to this latter point, it is undeniable that a curious emphasis is given to the *freshness* both of the wrappings and of the wreath; while it does not seem rash to suppose that a Delphian priest might know what wrappings and ornaments would be found with an infant of the Athenian royal house, and find it easy to provide them from the Athenian Room in the treasury of offerings. (The description of the banqueting-tent shows what the resources were.) Creusa could be relied on to recognize anything within reason; and a recognizable Athenian cradle was perhaps the one way of preventing bloodshed; for which the Delphian priests should be given credit. This, however, is a part of Verrall's interpretation which can be best followed, with all its enthusiastic exaggerations and special pleading, in his edition of the play. The study of the central character is probably a sounder approach, and that has now been completed at least in outline.

In favour of the opposite or traditional view, which takes the play more at its surface value, is consideration of the prologue, where Hermes narrates as true the story of Creusa's rape. But we may observe, first, that Hermes also implies that this fact will remain concealed – and there he is wrong. Which is the less godlike, to speak falsehood on purpose or by mistake? Or why should Hermes be blameless, when his brother is proved liar in the same play? Further, it is surely reasonable to hold that, for the more intelligent part of the audience, the fiasco of Athene's remarks in the epilogue may have cast suspicion on the divine utterance in the prologue; while for the less intelligent there was a quick-moving play providing emotion, humour, and suspense. The matter can perhaps not be taken as finally settled; but I feel there is little doubt as to which view makes the better play.

II

More than one-third of *The Women of Troy* is written in lyrical metres; and much of the blank-verse dialogue is static. The play itself contains little that can be called either action or plot. The traditional tragic pattern showed an heroic figure in a position of greatness, an act of pride arising from weakness, a catastrophe and death. In this play the 'tragic hero' is the Greek army; their sin is the desecration of temples

and the murder of the innocent, such as Polyxena and Astyanax; and the catastrophe is the storm promised by Poseidon in the prologue, and heard rising as the ships weigh anchor at the end of the play – a storm to shatter the returning fleet. The bulk of the play consists of an enlargement to life-size of a single moment in this moving pattern – the sufferings of a small group of women from the captured city as they wait for their departure into slavery. The play's denunciation of such horrors stirs the conscience and the fears of our own century with enough force to place it among the most often performed of Euripides' plays. Its relevance to the situation of its original audience was even more urgent and far more specific; so that its failure to win the prize at the Great Dionysia in 415 B.C. may have been due as much to its emotional effect as to intellectual dissatisfaction with its form.

At the time of its production Athens had been at war with Sparta for some sixteen years. Every summer except one a Spartan army had occupied and plundered Attica, depriving the city of nearly all its home-grown food. During the summer months the whole country population camped between the Long Walls that ran from Athens to Peiraeus – a space of three miles by three hundred yards. In the second summer of the war, plague had ravaged the crowded population, causing frightful suffering. For fifteen years success by land and sea had varied until, in 416 B.C., the largest overseas expedition ever equipped by a Greek state had sailed from Peiraeus for Sicily, to win the alliance of the Sicilian cities. Clearly by this time feeling in Athens for or against continuing the war was intense. For there was, and continued to be until the very end, a Peace Party; and Athens insisted on hearing their views, just as Hecabe insists that Menelaus shall hear Helen. Clearly, also, the fortunes of the Peace Party were lowest when hopes of the Sicilian expedition were so high. But the morale of the citizens on the launching of this vast enterprise was somewhat impaired by a sense of guilt at their action the previous year in the matter of the island of Melos. The Melians, having a tradition of friendship with Sparta, refused the Athenian demand for a contribution of men or money for the war, and asked to be allowed to remain neutral. The Athenians rejected this reasonable plea, attacked Melos and ultimately captured it; they then put to death all the male inhabitants, sold the women and children as slaves, and colonized the place with some of their own citizens. In the Athenian Assembly there

had been bitter controversy over a method of warfare regarded by many as needlessly rigorous even in the case of a barbarian enemy, and outrageous when practised against fellow-Greeks. There can be no doubt that Euripides meant in *The Women of Troy* to give his fellow-citizens a picture of what they had done to Melos. So topical a performance would certainly hold attention without the help of a plot; and the author clearly felt free to develop a reflective theme unencumbered by suspense or surprise.

Euripides himself proved a Cassandra. Within eighteen months retribution had come to Athens; the whole of her Sicilian armament, supplemented by a second almost equal supply of men, ships and equipment, was lost. Not till many months later did a few survivors straggle home. Even then the warning of this play was not heeded. For a further nine years the Athenians continued to pride themselves on giving a hearing to the Peace Party, and destroy themselves by giving power to the War Party; until at last Athens surrendered to Sparta, and her Long Walls were demolished. But by that time Euripides had died in voluntary exile in Macedon.

The prologue establishes the formal tragic pattern by conversation between a pair of deities, whose character conforms to the type conceived in Homeric times, and developed by Euripides for his special purpose of representing the intangible forces, both natural and moral, which govern human life. Like Death and Apollo in *Alcestis*, Aphrodite and Artemis in *Hippolytus*, they are egotistic and amoral; self-conscious puppets expressing emotions which they seem to assume as a sort of solemn game; illuminating by their very pettiness and falsity the dignity and reality of the human figures whose fates they control.

The play's action comprises four episodes, concerned respectively with Cassandra, Andromache, Helen, and the dead Astyanax. Hecabe is on the stage from beginning to end. She, the Chorus, Cassandra and Andromache are all dishevelled and ragged; they have been dragged from their beds, hurried through burning streets, and kept for a couple of days in a ruined room under military guard. The excitement of the Cassandra-scene and the pathos of the Andromache-scene are set off by this drabness of colour, while Hecabe's authority and dignity bind the episodes together. Then, after the 'Salamis Ode,' comes the kind of change which offers great scope to an imaginative

producer. First, the emotional pressure is punctured by the self-satisfied pomposity of Menelaus. Then the mysterious utterance of Hecabe makes us look suddenly at her to see if we still recognize her. faced at last with the man who made the war – and a Spartan – has she no curse, but only praise of Zeus? Finally, into a sordid half-light which has accustomed the eye to greyness bursts, in all the radiance of her divine beauty, Helen.

The realization of the character of Helen is something which will probably continue to elude the modern English mind. Certainly her words in this scene are puzzling enough at a first reading, and her whole attitude has been variously understood. In the first place, it should be remembered that this play is the third of a trilogy in which the first was *Alexander* (the other name of Paris); and it is at least possible that the part of Helen's speech referring to the Judgement of Paris assumes a knowledge of what happened in the earlier play, and of the character of Paris there shown. The lines are extremely condensed, even to obscurity, and this points to the same possibility. Suppose, for example, that Euripides presented Paris, not as the rather flat and colourless lover described in the Iliad, but as a natural genius who, conscious of his capacity to attain the summits of glory in the arts of government or war (the prizes offered by Hera and Athene), had deliberately set them aside and chosen instead the pursuit of beauty (and what symbol of eternal beauty should Greek folk-lore choose, if not the face and form of a living woman?) – if when the third play began Paris was established in the minds of the audience as a real man with qualities on the heroic scale, the first half of Helen's speech would take on a clearer meaning. Let us now look at it in more detail.

Her first two sentences show the absence both of fear and of any sense of guilt; in fact, she is ready to meet Menelaus on an equal footing – though well aware that force is on his side. Then come two arguments which, taken at their face value, make Helen sound so weak-minded as immediately to forfeit all attention. She says, first, that it was all Hecabe's fault, and Priam's, for not killing Paris at birth; secondly, that she was tempted by Aphrodite. To accept this as the whole meaning of the passage is, I feel, to give up Euripides in despair. If, however, the legend of Helen's beauty was concerned (as we would expect of the Greeks) not with skin-deep beauty but with

the beauty which unites flesh and spirit indissolubly in an intelligent personality (which is what the whole of Greek art teaches us), and if Euripides so understood it; then we have in this scene a woman trying to put into words something which has occupied every poet from her day to ours; a truth which she perceived, which she knew to be past the understanding of Menelaus, which perhaps could be expressed only in myth; but which possibly some of her hearers in the audience, who had known Paris in the earlier play, might be able to understand.

'It was all Hecabe's fault, and Priam's, for not killing Paris at birth.' Thus begins the central speech in the central scene in the play. Such an opening is either infantile – rather imbecile – or pregnant; it is spoken either like a fish-wife's daughter, or like a daughter of Zeus. If the latter, the speech may mean something like this:

'You are trying to fix the blame for all this suffering – on me. You made the war; I was the cause of your action; Paris was the cause of my action; his parents were the cause of Paris – where are we to stop? Of course Hecabe and Priam are innocent: no parents would kill their child for fear of a prophecy. But in this world different kinds of people have to meet and mix; and some mixtures are explosive. Paris was a man to whom the gods offered every prize that the world contains. He rejected the sceptre and the sword. If he had chosen them, the result would have been the same – war between East and West; but victory might have gone to the other side. As it was, Fate prepared the situation; all that was needed to set it in motion was the opportunity. This you, Menelaus, provided, by going away and leaving me alone with Paris. In short, it took three to make adultery: one to urge, one to accept, and one to make possible. I am only one of those three; and above us all was Fate, who made us as we are.'

This may or may not seem a good defence. But Helen continues: 'It was no minor deity who came with Paris.' What could the godhead of Aphrodite mean, if not that men had always recognized in love a power transcending human laws? For many – indeed for most – it might be true that 'their appetite became their Aphrodite'. But if in this case it was the goddess herself – and Helen throughout talks the figurative language of the philosopher Euripides, not the make-believe language of fairy-tale – who was to judge Helen? She might have added, that many husbands had been made cuckold before Menelaus:

was it because he was the slave of Ares that he alone made his plight the excuse for a ten years' war?

For nine years Helen had lived with Paris as his wife. We know from Homer how the men of Troy worshipped her; we guess from Hecabe how the women hated her. Yet there is no record of any suspicion of a cloud in their love; until at last Paris was killed. What is there either improbable or unworthy in Helen's statement that after Paris's death she tried to get back to the Greek camp, but was forcibly held by Deiphobus? Hecabe's contradiction (as we shall see presently) will hardly pass muster. Helen concludes by telling Menelaus that his view of the whole matter is far too simple, that he is dealing with realities which he cannot even begin to understand. She makes no defence of adultery as such; but she refuses to pretend to feel guilt, when she is conscious only that she, Menelaus, Paris, and every unfortunate being concerned in the affair, have from the beginning been at the mercy of mysterious and incalculable forces; that folly urges revenge, and wisdom forgiveness.

Because in a number of plays Euripides shows women with vicious streaks in their characters; because in that curious play *Orestes*, written some years later, Helen is presented in an unpleasant light; because Helen is abused in a number of plays (as doubtless she was in fact) by men and women who had suffered in the Trojan war; it is generally assumed that in this play her character must be bad. If that is so, the play is weak at the very point where it seems meant to be strong. But we must look now at Hecabe's part in this scene.

She has greeted Menelaus's arrival and his announcement of his intentions with a fervent thanksgiving. The man who more than any other made the war and destroyed her city, she welcomes as an ally – and he is a Spartan. She begs the privilege of helping Menelaus to pass a just judgement on his wife. When Helen has finished speaking, the Chorus show that they are of one mind with Hecabe; they share in the fantastic change that has come over their queen with the arrival of Helen. 'There is something sinister here,' they say; but by far the most sinister thing is the united venom with which all the women present close ranks and face the woman they hate.

Hecabe begins her reply. 'What nonsense to say that Hera promised victory to Paris!' (We agree – we had already guessed there was a deeper meaning than that.) 'She came to Mount Ida merely for

recreation!' The blatant absurdity of it prepares us for more, and more follows at once. 'Could not Aphrodite by a word have brought you to Troy, without troubling to go and fetch you?' Hecabe accepts divine agency in its crudest, most literal form; yet she will not allow it to be any excuse. Next comes her anger against Helen's 'extravagance and insolence' – the invariable complaint of a jealous mother-in-law. Next, 'You say my son carried you off from Sparta by force.' It is strange how many readers of the play never pause to observe that this is a direct lie; Helen admitted from the first that she went willingly with Paris. Yet Hecabe scores her sarcastic points in refuting what was never stated. Then, after another obvious reflection of a mother-in-law's quarrels, all words and no substance, she answers Helen's statement that she had tried to leave Troy by asking her why she had not tried to commit suicide. Next, 'I told you my sons could find other women to love' – can we not hear that scolding refrain, endlessly repeated for ten years? And now the truth shows: 'You come out here beautifully dressed.' Helen has been dragged through charred streets like the others; but she has, by sheer genius, found a clean dress, washed her face and combed her hair. That is the unforgivable sin. Finally, Hecabe appeals to Menelaus to 'crown the victory of Hellas' – Hecabe, Queen of Troy. No wonder that editions of this play still in use in schools summarize Hecabe's speech by saying that she 'effectively disposes of Helen's feeble and insincere defence'! If Menelaus himself were alive to-day, he might make a quiet living by writing commentaries on Euripides.

It is remarkable that this pathetic display of blind, uncontrollable jealousy, stronger than all the sorrow and all the love hitherto shown, has so often been accepted as in no way derogating from the dignity of Hecabe. The truth is that in this scene Hecabe throws away all the sublimity so far achieved, and shows a glimpse of that element in her nature which Euripides treats more fully in the play called by her name. The still deeper truth is, that sublimity seems to us most vivid when exhibited as the achievement of an imperfect character; and that the pathos of the gall of hate poured from so noble a vessel is more effective than any other kind of pathos could be, in establishing the humanity, the naturalness, the inevitability, of those complexes of human suffering which Helen was trying to describe in the first half of her speech, and which are embodied in the symbolic figure of

Hecabe. Hecabe's burst of viciousness cancels the unreal pattern c black and white, villain and victim, and shows instead the balance group of imperfect individuals, caught together in the noose of relentless Fate, which is Euripides' habitual way of exhibiting th human tragedy.

The summing-up of the debate is characteristically ironical. Mene laus in two short sentences shows that he has not listened to a wor spoken by Helen, and could not have understood it if he had. Helen 'The gods are to blame, not I!' comprises in fact the philosophic truth of the matter. She will not admit guilt or remorse; what she di she would do again; but she will ask forgiveness – the constant an universal claim and duty of man; and the creed of Euripides. Th Chorus beg Menelaus to be worthy of his family; and we think c Atreus and Thyestes and the murdered Iphigenia. Hecabe kneels t speak for the Greeks dead in battle and their children; and we reflec on this broad sympathy that springs from an intimate hatred. Mos ironical of all, the braggart Menelaus on departing leaves behind hir the certainty that he will not have the strength to carry out his in tended revenge; that he will be as good as his reputation, and live woman's man.

Now the play is out of balance; for the moment it has no centra figure. Once Helen has gone, Hecabe must be raised again from th depths to dominate as before by native moral strength. This i supremely achieved by the mourning over Astyanax. After that th crescendo never relaxes until, in gathering darkness deepened b Troy's last flames, the final overwhelming crash of Pergamus merge in the howl of the rising storm.

III

It is possible to enjoy a work of art for the succession of moving o delightful moments it provides, together with a vague impression o design and a strong sense of atmosphere, without troubling to acquir that knowledge of detail, association, and source which was assume by the author as necessary to its full comprehension; as, for example many English readers have enjoyed and will continue to enjoy suc works of art as *Gulliver's Travels* or *The Waste Land*. In this way a reade may find great enjoyment in *Helen*, while allowing numerous ques tions to remain unanswered. It is impossible to miss the attraction o

Helen herself – her rare grace, wit, lightness of touch; for gravity to remain proof against the sublime absurdity of Menelaus, his courage and his loin-cloth; or for one's sense of theatre not to respond to the play's racy, confident invitation to suspend now disbelief, now belief, as each quick-moving development may require. It was written in a good humour which is infectious, and in a poetic mood which quickens both eye and heart.

But it is in fact a play full of puzzles. Its plot is largely modelled on that of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, with an opening taken from *Andromache*, a lyric strophe and an entrance from *Hippolytus*; there are also very many verbal echoes, mainly from *Iphigenia*. Every dramatist sometimes repeats himself; but not to this degree, except in deliberate parody. So far as I know, only one thoroughly worked-out explanation has been put forward of why Euripides wrote such a parody of his own work. It is that of A. W. Verrall, in his chapter on *Helen* in *Four Plays of Euripides*. As usual, Verrall weakens his own case by adducing needless and far-fetched proofs (in this case, for example, his arguments drawn from those lines in which Menelaus suggests that he should try to kill Theoclymenus, and Helen dissuades him). But the sound evidence presented is fairly convincing, and well worth reading (especially pp. 64–9 of the work quoted). The explanation offered also accounts perfectly for the otherwise inexplicable irrelevance of the fourth Ode (the 'Demeter Ode'), for the mention of the island of Helene in the epilogue, for the burlesque based on this play which appears in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, produced in the year after the public production of *Helen*; and indeed for the choice of subject and the use of parody. In brief, Verrall holds that this play was first written for private performance at the house of an elderly unmarried lady (complimentarily represented by Theonoe) on the occasion of the festival of the Thesmophoria, when rites attended only by women were performed in honour of Demeter the Great Mother and her daughter Persephone. As Euripides had been taxed with never showing any virtuous woman in his plays, such a festival, dedicated especially to women, would be a suitable occasion on which to present at last the perfect woman, and in doing so to concede so much to his critics as to make fun of some of his previous work, to compliment his friends, and to include a splendid poem in honour of the two goddesses. After some years (according to this view) the play, now

known at second-hand, or from reading, to a number of Athenians, w presented at the Dionysia; and provided Aristophanes with inspir tion for the *Thesmophoriazusae*, which he produced in the following yea

There is one other book which I would recommend to those wh are interested in this play: the commentary, mainly textual, of Pr fessor A. Y. Campbell; a work containing more witty illumination detail than any comparable work of exact scholarship that I have me Professor Campbell finds the play – or the poem, as he prefers to ca it – quite satisfying without recourse to Verrall's theory. Doubtle this is a matter on which Greek scholarship will make up its mind i its own good time.

On any showing, the machinery of the play must be admitted t bear a somewhat makeshift appearance, suggesting that nothing her is as serious as it pretends to be. The arrival of Teucer is given onl the most perfunctory explanation; he has not been caught, nor ha his ship – presumably at anchor – been sighted by Theoclymenus guards; he seems to have missed Menelaus and his crew entirely; h departs – without his fair wind for Cyprus – into the nebulous exil from which he appeared. His sole function is to provide the dramati machinery for giving Helen news which she might in fact have go from Theonoe any time in the last seven years. Again, Verrall' theory, if true, would allow us to suppose this episode to contai references of personal interest to a private audience.

After the first Ode comes Helen's soliloquy – very similar to Andro mache's in *Andromache*; except for two points – indeed, pointers The tragedy of her life, Helen says, has been that she is reputed t have been born in an egg, and has therefore always been known as a freak. And she contemplates suicide, remembering, perhaps, the heroic fortitude of Iocasta, Eurydice, Phaedra. But fortitude is not enough. 'I will not be seen dangling in a rope!' The Chorus have a better suggestion: 'Go and see Theonoe.' So Helen, whose position in Theoclymenus' palace is so desperate that she has taken sanctuary, and brought a mattress (we may comfort ourselves that she spent last night in her bed; as plays always begin in the early morning, she has all day to contrive the means of not being put to test) – Helen now abandons the protection of Proteus' tomb, taking opportunity again to toy prettily with heroic fantasies of suicide. And meanwhile the power of poetry holds the feelings in so perfect a balance, that she

can pass straight from false tragedy and romantic gesture to 'Weep for the tears of Troy', and the topical seriousness of 'Through Hellas too the same river of weeping runs' (a fairly close echo of an Ode in *Andromache*); followed by some charming lines about mythical beauties who suffered from the jealousy they aroused – lines which it is quite unnecessary to join Verrall in contemning as 'Alexandrian'.

By this time the choice blend of comedy and poetry has established itself and taken charge of the proceedings; and Menelaus enters wearing his rag of sail. A passage in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* tells us how celebrated was Euripides' tendency to exhibit his heroes in rags (chiefly in plays now lost, such as *Telephus*); and the reiterated insistence on this detail in *Helen* sounds like a joke with richly-enjoyed personal references. But on his first appearance Menelaus, for the moment disregarding his attire, introduces himself, as all members of the House of Pelops introduced themselves on the Attic stage, with reminiscence of an incident in the gruesome family history; though the exact reference he selects was probably used on this occasion only. From it he proceeds to a few self-commendatory and quite irrelevant remarks which would give the actor scope for impersonating any tedious political orator of the day. The whole speech, in fact the whole character of Menelaus, is comedy of the kind excellently represented by Menelaus himself in the play *The Private Life of Helen*, produced in London in 1953.

After the recognition, poetry and true sentiment hold the stage for a while, and the old servant delivers some home truths about oracles to Athenians who were always too ready to use them. Then, after a prolonged 'build-up', Theonoe enters; and proceeds at once to demonstrate her omniscience – by *telling Helen* that the man standing there in rags is her husband! This neat device removes all needless terror from the figure of the formidable prophetess, whose initial unkindness is only for the sake of the scene – and, as the Chorus say, because we all want to hear Menelaus plead for his life. Menelaus does so, and satisfies every expectation; and Theonoe, in agreeing to help him escape with Helen, once again balances the comedy with a tender seriousness, speaking of the dead Proteus in terms which seem to anticipate the voice of Socrates in his last days, and which must surely have referred to some person known and mourned by the play's first audience.

The next Ode, the 'Nightingale Ode' (corresponding to th 'Halcyon Ode' of *Iphigenia in Tauris*), contains a direct appeal to th makers of war to cease their competition in bloodshed; and to philc sophers to turn their attention from academic speculation to th needs of mankind; and then enters the barbarian king, who, by bein several degrees more comic than Thoas, maintains the essential differ ence between this play and its more serious model. From here to th end the action pursues its obvious course; with a last mention c Menelaus's rags, a barrage of double meanings, a 'suspense Ode', Messenger's speech and closing theophany both modelled on those i *Iphigenia*, and the tail-piece familiar from *Alcestis* and found again i *The Bacchae*.

A word must be said about the 'Demeter Ode'. It is mainly narra tive, and in this respect corresponds to the last Ode in *Iphigenia*. Bu that Ode tells the story of the Delphic Oracle; and the whole pla was concerned with the question, Will the oracle, which bad Orestes kill his mother, protect him against the consequences c obedience, or betray him? and in the Messenger's speech followin the Ode we hear that the oracle has for the third and final time be trayed him. That Ode is as relevant as it can be. But the 'Demete Ode' in *Helen* has no reference whatever to the subject of the play the most that can be said is that it concerns the daughter of a deit who was taken from her home by divine agency. This strained resem blance is quite a different thing from, for example, the parallel case quoted by the Chorus in the last Ode of Sophocles' *Antigone*. If Ver rall's guess is rejected, it remains to find some more convincin reason why Euripides on this one occasion gave up the attempt to finc something appropriate for the Chorus to sing.

IV

The Bacchae was Euripides' last play, written when, past seventy years of age, he had at last left behind the hectic, exhausted, war-obsessed city of Athens, and escaped from a quarter-century of siege into the mountain-freshness of Macedon. The emotional experience involved in this change is hard for us to imagine; the painful act itself may have followed some years of hesitation; there was no prospect of return. The stimulus of new air and scenery is felt at work in the vividness o many lines describing the power and mystery of mountain solitudes;

and the theme of the play, the Dionysiac cult, is new for Euripides; but the material in which the theme is worked out, the nature of human character and human environment – this has the familiar stamp; and it is almost certain that so intense and complete a work was the result not of a sudden new inspiration, but of many years of thought. The play grew out of the Athenian world, out of the despairing follies of a disillusioned people, and was addressed to their ears as the last testament of a man who knew them and their need better than any other man except Socrates.

I hope that many of those who read this translation will give themselves the pleasure of reading Mr R. P. Winnington-Ingram's fascinating exposition of the play, *Euripides and Dionysus*. As a help in understanding the enormous power, range and completeness of *The Bacchae* as a work of art and a comment on human life, I can imagine no better book; while at the same time it forcibly illustrates the value and relevance of Classical studies to-day. I can make no attempt to summarize here the wealth of detailed illumination to be found in this book; but it provides the basis of most of what I have to say.

It is necessary first to dispose of two unsatisfactory theories of the play's meaning. The first is the 'recantation' theory. This view holds that Euripides, after a lifetime of intellectualism and disbelief in the gods, in old age repented and wrote this play to express and encourage reverence for the gods, by showing the fate of those who oppose them. But, though in the first half of the play there is some room for sympathy with Dionysus, this sympathy steadily diminishes until at the end of the play his inhuman cruelty inspires nothing but horror. A power, a 'daemon', Dionysus certainly is; one that may establish a strong hold on a section of society, produce leaders, threaten governments; but not one whom decent people will be prepared to worship. The tragedy of Pentheus is not that he tried to do what was wrong; but that he was the wrong man to do it – he was, in fact, precisely the unbalanced, excitable type of person who most easily falls victim to the allurements of Dionysiac indulgence.

The other unsatisfactory view is Verrall's 'rationalistic' theory. Verrall held that Euripides took the well-known legend, with its strong miraculous element, and treated it to show how the belief in these miracles had arisen from purely natural events, wrongly interpreted by the mass-hallucination of Bacchic devotees. But the question

of natural or supernatural causation of such incidents is one of minor interest compared with the main themes of the play which we shall examine presently. *The Bacchae* deals with the danger to society arising from the cult of mass-emotion; with the different reactions to the appearance of a new religion, and the dangers inherent in each; with heredity and responsibility, the fear and the destruction of truth. Miracles are used as ingredients, but there is stronger meat that makes the dish.

By the time the cult of Dionysus made its first appearance in Greece – at what date is not known – the Olympian gods were already firmly enthroned. Dionysus, however, seems to have taken his place among them within a very short time; he was accepted as son of Zeus, and given a place alongside Apollo at Delphi. He was primarily a spirit of life, and of all that produces or liberates life; liberates it from pain or fatigue, from tedium or ugliness, from the bonds of responsibility, law, pity, or affection. One of his most obvious and popular gifts was that of wine; but his exclusive association with wine was a later development. Music, dancing, and above all the excitement of group-emotion, of worshipping in a company distinguished by dress, secret rites, and a consciousness of power residing in mass-surrender to the supernatural – these were all means by which this cult attracted not only the more excitable Oriental, but the Greek who for one reason or another found the demands and restrictions of civilized life profitless and irksome.

Indeed it seems possible that the first rise of such a movement, whenever it may have occurred, was an instinctive reaction of the healthy, freedom-loving mind and flesh of humanity against the curbs applied by the spread of civilized communities and law. Greek common-sense recognized the necessity of such reaction, and provided a safety-valve by sanctioning Dionysiac rites at certain periodic festivals. But at the end of the fifth century the problem was showing a new urgency. For three generations, ever since the repulse of Persian power, most Greek states had tried in varying degrees to order their public life according to reason; autocracy had given place to assembly, debate, and the vote. This had led to a generation of war; to a degree of organization which had taken from life much of its liberty and beauty and joy and given nothing in return. The life of reason had proved too great a strain. Dionysiac worship offered an

escape from reason back to the simple joys of a mind and body surrendered to unity with Nature.

The characteristic Dionysiac experience is fully described in the Herdsman's speech on p. 202. It begins with a large band of worshippers enjoying a delightful picnic in the mountains, all cares and responsibilities of domestic and city life left behind; they sing and dance in a modest and orderly manner. But at the first shock or stimulus excitement leaps up; they begin running; they find themselves endowed with enormous physical strength, released from inhibitions and impelled towards violence; as oneness with Nature has been the object of their surrender, they merge themselves in the larger life of the animal creation and act towards other species as animals do – with murderous ferocity; they hunt goats and cattle and tear them in pieces; the hunt may be followed by a feast of raw flesh. Then, the ecstatic impulse fulfilled, they relax, wash themselves, and become again quiet and orderly human beings. In their peaceful moments they suckle young animals; in their ferocity they tear them. This combination of opposites is an essential feature of Bacchic madness; and Agauë shows it in precisely this form, for she was Pentheus' mother. There seems also to have been a belief that the prey they pursued and caught embodied the god himself; so that it was the god who was eaten, and thus entered into all his worshippers. This is illustrated by Pentheus; for it is only when his own personality has abdicated, and the god has entered into him, that he becomes a ritual victim.

There is little evidence to tell us in what ways the Dionysiac movement made itself felt among Euripides' contemporaries in Athens; though certain Eastern orgiastic cults are known to have found adherents. Whether this trend had yet produced definite social organizations, whether the political implications of such cults were already showing above the surface, or only as yet apprehended by the insight of genius, it is hard to say. But *The Bacchae* is a play written to convey a solemn warning against a real danger; how real, the parallel of our own time, the growth of mass hysteria, the cult of violence, the spread of credulity, the 'flight from reason', all bring home to us. Our own generation's experience of Nazism will illustrate the universality of the theme; for the bands of youths under their worshipped leaders, revelling in the Bavarian mountains, believing racial myths,

singing heroic songs, revering Woman and the Home, and beating up the next Jew they met – they were in some essentials Dionysiac; and the disease which produced them is not yet dead.

In other plays, such as *Hippolytus*, Euripides shows gods as representing certain given elements in the natural and social world. Unless we wish to court disaster, we must come to terms with Aphrodite, Artemis, Hera, Poseidon; and the terms will be theirs, not ours. We cannot expect the universe to be on our side, or even to be impartial; moderation, humility, a readiness to endure, and, above all, human kindness – these are the keys to a tolerable life; and the amorality of divine omnipotence cannot impair the ultimate dignity of man. But the presentation of Dionysus in *The Bacchae* is different. He is not a formally personified background, but the character who dominates the action. Aphrodite and Artemis are powers whose service, while not perfect freedom, is at least compatible with moderation, and whose resentment is only roused by outspoken contempt; Dionysus on the contrary is himself the embodiment of excess; and while in the play no conditional way of accepting his divinity is proposed as an alternative to Pentheus' insane attempt to expel him by force, it is made perfectly clear that his nature is not merely amoral but bestial, and hostile to the highest human values which the slow progress of man has won to distinguish him from beasts.

In all mystery religions, with their secret rites and initiations, the central notion is that of manifesting the nature of the god to his worshippers. In the prologue Dionysus announces his intention of manifesting himself as a god to those who at first have rejected him. Throughout the action the verb 'to show', and its correlatives 'to recognize' and 'to understand', are constantly repeated. And two distinct processes are implied: first, the acknowledgement of Dionysus' existence as a divinity; and secondly the understanding of the nature of this divinity – of its lawless and pitiless cruelty, of the affront which its claim to worship offers to human dignity and sensibility. In the course of the manifestation the language of the play presents as it were a series of moral claims made by the new cult, and the different appearance of these claims when revealed in the actions of Bacchic worshippers.

It is as though the Dionysiac apostle said to the world of Euripides: 'Civilization is diseased; get away from civilization, and have a *sound*

mind. Your search for cleverness is relative and conventional; discover your oneness with Nature, and possess absolute *wisdom*. Civilization is responsible for ugliness, anxiety, and malice; escape from it to *beauty, peace, and gentleness*. The civilized world is unjust; Nature is *just*. A city life is materialistic, inhuman; go to the mountains and discover that man is *divine*. Each of these claims is given its illumination as the play proceeds. Soundness of mind is revealed as imperviousness to pity; wisdom as knowing how to take revenge; beauty as natural, i.e., fortuitous and amoral; gentleness and peace as liable without warning to give place to ferocious violence; justice as personal vindictiveness; divinity as being superhuman in power, subhuman in nature, showing that the *beast in man* is worse than bestial, that the horned god is no other than a fiend. In short, Euripides here exposes that systematic abuse and perversion of accepted moral terms which we recognize to-day as a feature of the despairing and disillusioned society, which has tried the way of reason for a little while, and failed, and does not know where to turn.

The difference which *The Bacchae* shows in the treatment of the divine character is accompanied by a difference in the treatment of the central human figure. Outwardly Pentheus is at once recognizable as the king who yields to the temptation of power, commits 'hybris' against man and god, and is overtaken by catastrophe. In the traditional pattern an heroic character is betrayed by a weakness which the particular occasion renders fatal. But in Pentheus it is hard to find the heroic quality. His strength appears as obstinacy, his courage as plain folly, while his indignation is suspect, as arising from a suppressed craving for the enjoyment, at least as a witness, of those indulgences he attacks. Once his rational control has left him, the craving is no longer suppressed, but leads him straight to his doom. And the Fate which pursues him differs from that of other tragic heroes in that the element of chance is missing; as Mr Winnington-Ingram points out in his book, the word for 'chance', so constant a refrain in other plays, does not occur in *The Bacchae:* the malevolence of Dionysus is unique in the planned cruelty of its operation.

A third respect in which this play differs from others is its use of the Chorus. Whereas in plays like *Medea* the existence of a Chorus is almost an embarrassing concession to necessary form, the Chorus of *The Bacchae* is collectively a chief character and always concerned in

the action. The nature of Dionysus is expressed in deeds by th women of Thebes, whose doings are successively reported; in word by the Chorus. Their first Ode describes rapidly all the essentia features of their worship, its delight and its terror, its beauty and it cruelty, but all conveyed in decorous phrases which help the piou mind to skim happily over the contradictions involved. The secon Ode emphasizes the joy, gentleness, good sense, and peace which ar the gospel of Dionysus. This is their answer to the violence whic Pentheus is showing towards the meek and smiling god. In the thir they express indignation at their rejection by Thebes, and faith in th saving power of Dionysus, followed by a violent outcry agains Pentheus and an appeal to the god to restrain him. There follows th scene in which Dionysus asserts his power, and baffles and humiliate Pentheus. After this episode the Chorus carefully avert attention fron the violence and cruelty whose operation is now becoming evident and sing of peace, justice, and the law of Heaven; but in a brief refrain they avow that for them the noblest of all things is the joy of revenge. Finally, when Dionysus has departed with his victim to the mountain they throw off all restraint, and call for Pentheus' blood in words o pure savagery; when Agauë returns with her son's head they acclaim her; and their hesitation when invited to 'join in the feast' springs not from pity but from contempt.

The character of Pentheus has been much disputed; he has been called a blaspheming villain and an ascetic saint. The truth is now generally recognized to lie apart from both these descriptions. Before his first appearance a word from Cadmus, who sees him approaching, gives the key. 'He looks thoroughly upset.' He is; excitability is the weakness which needs only a crisis to prove fatal. But there is another weakness, shown clearly in his first speech. The women of Thebes, he says, driven mad by Dionysus, are practising secret rites in the mountains – so far he spoke the truth; but he proceeds first to assume that the Bacchic worship is 'a pretence', next to accept casual reports that drunkenness and sexual promiscuity are the real object of the movement. No doubt the sexual element was sometimes prominent in Dionysiac celebrations; it is referred to by Xuthus in *Ion*; but its absence in *The Bacchae* is conspicuous – except in the mind of Pentheus. He makes two other significant remarks: his one remedy for this moral disorder is force; and he intends to 'hunt' the Maenads and

atch them. Very soon a further report will show the uselessness of orce – but Pentheus will only rely on it more than ever. The idea of he hunt has already appeared in the first choral Ode; the imagery of he hunt will run right through the action, until Pentheus himself is unted and torn to pieces. One further significant phrase is used by entheus in this scene, in his last speech. In fury at the caution and the ebukes of Teiresias, he gives orders that his place of prophecy shall e 'turned upside down'. This very phrase is used three times more h the course of the play (see *Euripides and Dionysus*, p. 55, note) to escribe the indiscriminate destruction which is characteristic of the iolent phase of Bacchic possession. So here in his first appearance entheus shows that, when opposed, his instinctive recourse is to the me kind of 'berserk' behaviour which he is proposing to check and unish. This is the one point in the play which shows the fatal opera- on of that 'chance' which may await every man as a final test; Pen- heus' curse, like Hamlet's, is 'that ever he was born to set it right'. or Pentheus is a Dionysiac by nature. His half-consciousness of this, is fear of what he is, produces his crude puritanism. His counterpart n modern fiction is the parson in Somerset Maugham's famous story, *ain*. This weakness, hinted at in the first part of the play, comes ddenly into full view when Dionysus seizes upon it as the means by hich he will finally subjugate Pentheus. 'Would you like *to see* those omen ...?' And Pentheus, already weakened, now collapses, and he god enters into him.

In this final state he achieves two stages of understanding of which e was incapable while still 'sane'. First, he perceives that Dionysus as horns like a bull – the horns that were mentioned in the first horal Ode. That is to say, he perceives that Dionysus stands for the *east in man*, and belongs to that mysterious world of experience ound which the whole fabric of 'black magic' has been constructed. ut Pentheus has already crossed from this world to that, and feels no orror. Secondly, in the last moments of his life, when his mother ands over him and grips him, 'he understood what end was near'. e awakes from his trance to see in a flash of time the meaning of his ruggle and his folly; the only true perception he ever achieves.

Cadmus and Teiresias are both detailed and vivid studies. Cadmus, he wreck of a hero, obsessed with his family's reputation, who has arnt as a ruler to recognize strength when he meets it, and make

terms in good time, finds that all his shrewdness cannot save eith him or his family. Teiresias begins by disowning sophism, and pr ceeds to use nothing else. He speaks of wine as a necessary opiate f sorrow (an argument he can hardly have taken seriously), touches the connexion of Dionysus with war and prophecy (both pure academic or decorative points), and in general indicates the acco modating spirit in which Greece did in fact receive this new eleme in her religious life.

This brief introduction has given the merest outline of the range interest, historical, philosophical, and social, covered by this play, t ripest fruit of Euripides' mind. Every fresh reading of *The Bacchae* w reveal more of the truth and questioning which the author has packe into it. For further discussion of the play and its theme, besid *Euripides and Dionysus*, there is Professor Dodds's excellent editio the relevant chapter in Professor Kitto's *Greek Tragedy*; and the cha ter on Dionysus in Dr Seltman's *The Twelve Olympians*.

In conclusion I would like to say one more word about the use contemporary English in translations of Greek plays. In recent yea some writers and critics have been saying that the Biblical diction long used – and, I confess, often so well used – for translating the plays ought not to be abandoned; and that it is hopeless to attempt render in twentieth-century English ideas and feelings which belo entirely to another age.

Doubtless this view will continue to be held by many. I can on say that I regard it as an attitude of despair. If the ideas and feelin contained in the Greek original are themselves of a kind only to b expressed in language which exists only as a poetic convention of th last three centuries, then we must be stern and say that these thin are only for those who will learn Greek. The highest aim of a tran lation is to persuade the reader to dispense with it.

A distinguished critic recently made the issue very plain by con mitting himself to a particular phrase in *Hippolytus*. When Hippolyt comes stamping in, beside himself with rage, and the Nurse clings t him to bid him be silent, he says (literally), 'Will you please n bring your hand near to me, or touch my clothes?' This critic, reviewing a broadcast of *Hippolytus*, said how jarring he found it that Hipp lytus should shout, 'Keep your hands off my clothes!' and how muc

would prefer the greater dignity of 'Touch not my garments' ge!' I am not sure if dignity is of paramount importance at that par- ular moment; but I realize keenly how much is sacrificed if we ect that old and stately speech. Yet I do reject it. Modern English es not say 'Touch not', but 'Do not touch'. The negative command notorious weakness of modern English, so that if the command can made positive it will probably gain in strength. 'Garments' in dern English does not mean the same as 'clothes'; Hippolytus here ans 'clothes'. (The Authorized Version is not afraid of this word, Jesus said, 'Who touched my clothes?') Modern English says 'the ge of my garments' – if that is what is meant; not 'my garments' ge'. (The word 'edge' is not in the Greek.) It seems to me that here three ways of making a sentence sound unreal, all exemplified in e words.

If English, as at present written by good writers, cannot achieve uracy, universality, and force without loss of dignity, then English ot a language into which it is worth while to translate Greek plays. ere is no doubt that it can. I do not claim to have accomplished s; but I have stated very briefly the kind of reason which seems to to justify the attempt.

P.H.V.

ION

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Characters:

HERMES, *Messenger of the Gods*
ION
CHORUS *of women slaves of Creusa*
CREUSA
XUTHUS, *her husband, King of Athens*
OLD MAN, *slave of Creusa*
MESSENGER, *another slave of Creusa*
THE PRIESTESS *of Apollo at Delphi*
ATHENE

*

ne: The forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The play pens just before sunrise.

HERMES *enters from a grove of laurels and olives beside the temple porch.*

RMES: I am Hermes, servant of the Immortals. Almighty Zeus was my father; my mother was Maia, and she too was laughter of a goddess, and of Atlas, whose brazen shoulders wear the weight of the resting sky, the ancient home of gods. This place is Delphi, the centre and navel of the earth; and here Apollo prophesies to mortal men, chanting continually from his holy seat oracles concerning what is and what is to be. My reasons for coming here I must now explain.

You have all heard of Athens, known as the city of Pallas of the golden spear. There, at the foot of the mountain of Pallas, near a north-facing cliff called by the rulers of Attica The Long Rocks, Creusa, daughter of King Erechtheus, was found and ravished by Phoebus Apollo. She said nothing to her father – Apollo wished it so; but carried her body's bur-

den in secret until her time came. Then she bore her son her own home, and afterwards conveyed him to the sa cave where Apollo lay with her; and there, in a deep rocki cradle, she left him to die.

There was a tradition in her family which said that w Erichthonius was born of his mother Earth, Athene set a p of entwined serpents as his bodyguard to watch him, and entrusted him to the care of the daughters of Agraulus; a from that time to the present day the descendants of Ere theus duly adorn their children with a necklace of gol serpents. Creusa observed this custom; she also wrapp round the infant a rich shawl woven by herself as a girl; a so left him to die.

Then Apollo – who is my brother – came to me wit request. 'Go, brother,' he said, 'to the race that spra from the soil of Athens – you know the fame of their ci there in a rocky cave lies a new-born child: bring him Delphi – cradle, infant-clothes and all – to my oracle the and put him down right at the entrance to my temple. T rest you may leave to me; for the child, you must know mine.'

So, to oblige my brother, I took the basket-cradle a brought it, and laid the child here on the temple-ste leaving the curved lid wide open, so that he might be se Now it happened that just as the sun rode up the morn sky the Prophetess was entering the temple. She saw t infant, and was astonished that any Delphian girl should be bold as to cast her secret labour at Apollo's door. Her fi thought was to put it outside the precincts; but pity ov came sternness, and Apollo too moved her to let the ch stay. She took him and brought him up, not knowing eith that Apollo was his father, or who his mother was; and t boy knows no more than she. So the temple became home, and here as a child he wandered unrestrained. Wh he grew up, the Delphians appointed him guardian of t

emple gold and steward in general to Apollo; and so to this ay he leads a consecrated life here in the temple.

His mother Creusa meanwhile was married to Xuthus. It appened in this way: Athens became involved in a serious ar with the Euboeans, who are descended from Chalcodon. Xuthus fought as an ally of the Athenians and helped them to ictory; and he received in acknowledgement the hand of reusa, though he is no Athenian but an Achaean descended hrough Aeolus from Zeus. After many years of marriage he nd Creusa still have no child; and it is this, their longing for hildren, that has now brought them to the oracle of Apollo who, on his part, has not abandoned them as they suppose, ut is guiding their destiny to fulfilment. When Xuthus nters the oracle, Apollo will give his own son to him, and ill tell him that he, Xuthus, is his father; so that the boy nay come to his mother's house, and be recognized by her, nd receive the position due to his birth, without any ex- osure of her union with Apollo. He is to be called Ion; and Hellas shall know him as the founder of the Ionic settle- ents in Asia.

Now I'll retire into the laurel-grove, to see what Fate has n store for him. Here he comes, the son of Apollo, with his room of laurel-twigs, to sweep the porch clean. I am the rst of the gods to call him by the name he is to receive – on!

Exit HERMES. *Enter, from the temple,* ION, *with several temple attendants.*

N:

The dazzling chariot of the sun
Now lights the earth; and every star
Flies from that fire's fierce rising ray
Behind the night's mysterious bar.
Smoke of Arabian frankincense
Streams upward to the temple's height.
Parnassus' pathless peaks grow bright

With welcome to the new-born day.
Now on the holy tripod-seat
The Delphian priestess takes her place,
And daily to the Hellene race
Her chanting tones repeat
What her own ears have heard –
The thunders of Apollo's word.

Servants of Delphian Apollo!
Go to the Castalian spring;
Wash in its silvery eddies,
And return cleansed to the temple.
Guard your lips from offence;
To those who ask for oracles
Let the god's answer come
Pure from all private fault.

Attendants go out.

Now I will sweep the temple –
My duty here since childhood –
With a broom of laurel-branches,
And purify the entrance
With holy wreaths of flowers;
Sprinkle the floor with water;
And with my bow and arrows
I'll send the wild birds flying
That foul our temple treasures.

I have no father or mother;
All I would owe to them
I give to Apollo's temple,
Which nursed my orphan childhood.

Come, little broom, of fresh and lovely leaves
Gathered from the immortal laurel-groves,
Sacred foliage fed by unfailing waters

That gush from myrtle-thickets – come, my broom,
Used for Apollo's sacred hearth within,
Used for the cleansing of this holy floor,
When, as the swift sun wings the morning sky,
This ritual task I offer to Apollo.
Apollo, Lord of healing,
Apollo, son of Leto,
Blest be thy name, Apollo!

Phoebus, the service of thy temple-court,
The stewardship of thy prophetic seat,
Is honourable. Slave to no mortal master,
But an eternal god, I am exalted,
Toil without weariness in praise and prayer.
Apollo's temple nursed my infancy;
He by his kindness made himself my father;
I bless him by that name – I am his son.
Apollo, Healer, Saviour,
Apollo, son of Leto,
Blest be thy name, Apollo!

Enough of sweeping; rest, my laurel-broom.
Now with pure hands knowing no carnal touch
From golden jars I sprinkle earth's pure dew
Fresh from the swirling fountain of Castalia.
So may I live always Apollo's servant,
Or, if I cease, good fortune be my guide!

Ha! See, from their nests on Parnassus the birds come flocking!
Keep clear of the temple walls and the golden roof!
An eagle! Herald of Zeus,
With talons stronger than all other birds,
Take care! I will shoot again!
And there – a red-foot swan! Away, away!

Though Apollo himself played his lyre to your song,
That would not save you from my arrow!
Away, fly on! Alight on the lake of Delos!
If you will not obey me,
The sweet notes of your song will drown in blood!
Why, now! Another still? What bird is this?
Ah! Do you want to build under these eaves
And rear your young? My twanging bow shall scare you.
Away to the banks of Alpheius, and there toil
To feed your family, or to the Isthmian wood.
These are the holy precincts and the treasures
Of Apollo! There must be no uncleanness here.
And yet I hate to kill you –
You bring God's word to mortals.
I am Apollo's servant
And he is my protector;
Then I will do his bidding
And never cease to serve him.

The attendants now return and perform sacrifice; then exeunt with ION. *Enter the* CHORUS; *they walk to and fro admiring the buildings. Until* ION *re-enters they speak severally.*

CHORUS:

So holy Athens is not the only place
Where the gods have pillared courtyards
And are honoured as guardians of the streets.

– Apollo's temple too has the twin pediments,
Like brows on a smiling face.

– Look – look at this! The Lernian snake
Being killed by Heracles with his golden falchion –
Do look, dear!

– Yes, I see.
But who is this other next to him

Waving a flaming torch? Is it the man
Whose adventures we are told at weaving-time,
The brave fighter Iolaus
Who went with Heracles to his labours,
And stayed with him to the bitter end?

– Oh! and look here
At Bellerophon astride his winged horse
Killing the monster with three bodies
And fire belching from its nostrils!
– I am looking eagerly on every side.
See, carved on the marble wall,
The Giants overcome by the Gods in battle!

– Yes, we can see it from over here.
Ah! but behold her there, brandishing
Her Gorgon shield over Enceladus –

– I see her, my own Pallas Athene!

– And the thunderbolt, smouldering and irresistible,
Which Zeus holds ready to hurl from heaven!

– I see huge Mimas fiercely raging,
Charred with the flame of the thunderbolt.

– Here's yet another earth-born giant
Destroyed by Dionysus with no weapon
But his thyrsus wreathed with ivy-shoots.

Enter ION.

IORUS: You, Sir, by the doorway – may we take off our shoes and go into the sanctuary?
N: It is not allowed, friends.
IORUS: Then I would like to ask you a question.

ION: What do you want to know?

CHORUS: Is it true that Apollo's temple stands at the cent and navel of the whole earth?

ION: Yes, the Navel-stone is here, hung with wreaths, and th carved Gorgons on either side.

CHORUS: Just as we were told!

ION: If you have made your sacrifice of oil and honey, and wis to ask Apollo some question, you may come up to the alta but you may not go inside the temple unless you hav sacrificed sheep.

CHORUS: I understand. We only want to do what is allowe We like looking round outside.

ION: Yes, look round at everything that is open to the publi

CHORUS: Our mistress gave us permission to come and se the temple.

ION: Who is your mistress? Of what family?

CHORUS: A royal family. My mistress's home is the home c Athene. But here comes the Queen herself.

Enter CREUSA.

ION: Whoever you are, my lady, I can see at once you ar noble both in birth and nature. Royal blood shows itse in the face and bearing. – What? Oh, my lady, what is th matter? Why do you hide your eyes? Your cheeks are wet The sight of Apollo's oracle has made you weep! What ca be making you so unhappy? To see this temple gives joy t everyone else, but you – weep!

CREUSA: Young man, you are surprised at my weeping: tha is no discourtesy in you. At the first view of this house o Apollo I retraced the path of an old memory. My min strayed – far away from here. Oh! the wrongs of women the wickedness of gods! When our oppressor is all-powerful where shall we fly for justice?

ION: I don't understand you, my lady. What distresses you?

CREUSA: Nothing. I have shot my arrow. From now on I wil be silent – think no more about it.

ION: Who are you? Where do you come from, and what is your family? What name may I call you?

CREUSA: My name is Creusa. I am the daughter of Erechtheus, and my native land is the city of Athens.

ION: My lady, I reverence you both for the famous city which is your home and for the great king who was your father.

CREUSA: Yes, I am fortunate in them – not in other things.

ION: Now, in Apollo's name tell me – is the common story true –

CREUSA: What story, young man? What is it you're asking?

ION: That your father's ancestor was born from the earth?

CREUSA: Erichthonius, yes. My descent from him has not helped me.

ION: And did Athene really take him up out of the earth?

CREUSA: She did. But she was a virgin; she was not his mother.

ION: And then, as we see in so many paintings –

CREUSA: She gave him to Cecrops' daughters to keep, but forbad them to look at him.

ION: And they, naturally, opened Athene's box, I have heard –

CREUSA: And for that they met a bloody death on the sharp rocks.

ION: Oh! ... There is another story –

CREUSA: What do you want to ask? I have time enough.

ION: Is it true, or merely a tale, that your father Erechtheus killed your sisters in sacrifice?

CREUSA: It was for Athens that he steeled himself to it – children as they were.

ION: And how did you escape their fate?

CREUSA: I was a mere baby in my mother's arms.

ION: And is it true that your father was engulfed in a chasm which opened in the ground?

CREUSA: The sea-god's trident struck the earth – that was his grave.

ION: In your country there is a place called The Long Rocks?

CREUSA: Why do you ask that? – You reminded me of something.

ION: It is a place honoured by Apollo; he reveals himself there in lightning-flashes.

CREUSA: Honoured by ... Honoured! If only I had never seen it!

ION: It is a place Apollo loves dearly. Why do you hate it?

CREUSA: It is nothing. The caves there hold a certain shameful secret that I know of.

ION: What Athenian is your husband, my lady?

CREUSA: No Athenian; I am married to a foreigner.

ION: Who is he? No doubt a man of royal blood?

CREUSA: Xuthus; son of Aeolus and descended from Zeus.

ION: How could a foreigner win a wife of the true Athenian blood?

CREUSA: Athens was at war with the neighbouring city of Euboea –

ION: A city divided from you by an arm of the sea – yes?

CREUSA: Xuthus fought on our side and conquered Euboea.

ION: And then your ally became your husband?

CREUSA: I was the prize awarded for his valour.

ION: Are you making this pilgrimage with him or alone?

CREUSA: With him. I left him at the precinct of Trophonius.

ION: Has he come sightseeing, or for consultation?

CREUSA: He has one question to ask both Trophonius and Apollo.

ION: What is it about? His harvests? Or about children?

CREUSA: We have no children. We have been married a long time.

ION: You mean that you never bore any child all your life?

CREUSA: Never any child – Apollo knows how true that is!

ION: How sad! So much happiness – yet so great a sorrow!

CREUSA: But who are you? I am sure your mother is to be envied.

ION: They call me Apollo's slave, my lady; and so I am.

CREUSA: Did some State present you, or were you bought?
ION: I know nothing except that I am said to belong to Apollo.
CREUSA: Then it is now my turn to pity you!
ION: Yes; I know neither my father nor my mother.
CREUSA: Have you a home, or do you live in the temple?
ION: My home is any part of the temple buildings I happen to sleep in.
CREUSA: Were you a baby when you came here, or older?
ION: A baby, they tell me. I don't remember.
CREUSA: And so some Delphian woman suckled you and reared you?
ION: I was never nursed at the breast.
CREUSA: Poor child! You have suffered as I have.
ION: I was brought up by Apollo's priestess. I think of her as my mother.
CREUSA: And how have you been kept all these years?
ION: There were always the altar-offerings, and gifts from visitors.
CREUSA: Your poor mother! I wonder who she was.
ION: I am the child of some woman who was wronged, perhaps.
CREUSA: You are handsomely dressed. You must be well provided for?
ION: I am Apollo's slave; these clothes are all his.
CREUSA: But did you not do all you could to trace your parents?
ION: No, my lady. I have no evidence at all.
CREUSA: None at all! ... [*Then, with hesitation*] There is someone who has suffered the same fate as your mother ...
ION: Who is she? I would gladly find someone to share my sorrow.
CREUSA: It is for her sake I came here before my husband.
ION: What is it you want, my lady? I will help.
CREUSA: I want an answer from Apollo on a secret matter.
ION: Tell me. I will lay your question before him.

CREUSA: Listen, then. – But the shame is too much.

ION: Then you will get no answer. Shame never helped anyone.

CREUSA: She says – this friend – that Apollo lay with her . . .

ION: Apollo! With a mortal woman? You must not say it!

CREUSA: Yes! And she bore him a child, and kept it secret . . .

ION: Impossible! Some man wronged her, and she is ashamed to own it.

CREUSA: No, it was no man, she says; and she has suffered bitterly since.

ION: Suffered! With a god for her lover?

CREUSA: She took it – her own child – out of the house, and left it . . .

ION: Where is it, then? Is it alive?

CREUSA: No one knows. That is what I want to ask.

ION: What could have happened to it?

CREUSA: Poor little child! She thinks wild beasts killed it.

ION: What reason has she to think that?

CREUSA: She went back to where she left him – and he was gone.

ION: Was there any blood on the ground?

CREUSA: She says not; and she searched again and again.

ION: How long is it since the child was lost?

CREUSA: If he were alive he would be a lad of just your age.

ION: And since then she has had no other child?

CREUSA: Apollo cheats her of that too: she is childless and miserable.

ION: But – suppose that Apollo took him and has brought him up secretly?

CREUSA: Is that any more just – to enjoy alone what he ought to share?

ION: How sad! What you tell me echoes my own sadness.

CREUSA: You too – yes! Some poor mother must be longing for you.

ION: Do not revive a grief I had forgotten.

CREUSA: I will not. Tell me more about the question I asked you.

ION: Well: do you see that your case is very weak in one point ...

CREUSA: Is there any point in which – her case is not weak, poor woman?

ION: I mean this: is Apollo to reveal what he intends should remain a mystery?

CREUSA: Surely his oracle is open for every Greek to question?

ION: No. His honour is involved; you must respect his feelings.

CREUSA: What of his victim's feelings? What does this involve for her?

ION: There is no one who will ask this question for you. Suppose it were proved in Apollo's own temple that he had behaved so badly, he would be justified in making your interpreter suffer for it. My lady, let the matter drop. We must not accuse Apollo in his own court. That is what our folly would amount to, if we try to force a reluctant god to speak, to give signs in sacrifice or the flight of birds. Those ends we pursue against the gods' will can do us little good when we gain them. What heaven gives us gladly will bring blessing.

CHORUS: You may meet people in every variety of fortune and condition; but happiness in human life is hard to find.

CREUSA: Apollo! To the absent woman that I speak of, you were unjust then and you are still unjust. You ought to have protected your own son: you did not protect him. You are a prophet: yet you will not answer his mother's question, you will not help her to bury him if he is dead nor to see him again if he is alive. So I must go without the knowledge that I long for, since God denies it. ... Sir, I see my husband Xuthus arriving from the shrine of Trophonius. Say not a word to him about our conversation. I might incur

some disgrace for undertaking my friend's cause without his knowledge, and the matter might be unravelled beyond what I have told you. Life is harder for women than for men: they judge us, good and bad together, and hate us. That is the fate we are born to.

Enter XUTHUS.

XUTHUS: My first greeting is to the divine Apollo. My next to you, Creusa. You look disturbed: were you anxious at my delay?

CREUSA: No. A little – but then you came. Tell me, what does Trophonius say? Are we to have children?

XUTHUS: He would not anticipate Apollo's answer; but he told me this: neither you nor I shall return home from this temple childless.

CREUSA [*turning aside*]: Leto, holy mother of Apollo, bring us home in happiness! All that your son has been to us in the past, – turn it to good!

XUTHUS: Amen. – Now, who is the god's interpreter?

ION: I will take you to the sanctuary door; inside you will be guided by others, Delphian noblemen, appointed by lot to places near the Tripod Throne.

XUTHUS: Good; that is all I want to know before entering. I understand that a general sacrifice has been offered before the temple on behalf of all visitors, and that the day is auspicious. To-day, therefore, I wish to receive the divine answer. Meanwhile, Creusa, go round all the altars and decorate them with laurel-branches, and pray that I may hear from Apollo the promise of children.

Exit.

CREUSA: I will, I will! – If Apollo now will at least put right past wrong, – that could hardly make him my devoted lover; yet as much love as he wishes to show I will accept. He is a god.

Exit.

ION [*alone*]: What are these ambiguous hints? Every word held

a veiled reproach against Apollo. Is it all love of this friend for whom she asked her question? Or is she keeping back something best left unspoken? The daughter of Erechtheus is nothing to me. I will get the golden jars and fill the purifying-bowls. . . . I must remonstrate with Apollo: what can have come over him? He ravishes girls by force, then abandons them? He begets children by stealth, then leaves them to die? Apollo, no! Since you possess power, pursue goodness! Why, if a man is bad, it is the gods who punish him. How can it be right for you to make laws for men, and appear as lawbreakers yourselves? Why, if – suppose something impossible, for the sake of argument – if you, Apollo, and Poseidon, and Zeus King of Heaven, are to pay to men the lawful indemnity for every rape you commit, you will empty your temples in paying for your misdeeds. You put pleasure first and wisdom after – and it is sin! It is unjust to call men bad for copying what the gods find good: the sin lies with our examples!

Exit.

HORUS:

Come, my own Athene, who at Prometheus' touch
Sprang in unlaboured birth from the helmet-crest of Zeus,
Athene, holy victory, hear my prayer!
Fly from golden chambers of Olympus
To the streets where the prophetic temple stands,
Where from the tripod seat, from the central altar of earth,
Go forth unfailing oracles to the religious throng.
Athene, come! Come, Artemis! Sisters of Apollo,
Sisters in chastity and godhead, lend your untainted prayer,
That the ancient house of Erechtheus may receive after many years
A clear answer, and the promise of children!

Happiness beyond measure, wealth inexhaustible,
Belong to the man who guards in his father's house

A golden fruitful store of sons and daughters,
To inherit his possessions and bequeath them;
Defence in trouble, delight in peace;
A strong sword arming his native land.
Give me children of my own to rear and be proud of,
Rather than riches or a royal palace.
A life without children – I have no use for it,
No, nor for anyone who wants it.
I would rather be only moderately rich, and have a fi
family.

I think of the Long Rocks,
The cliffs and caverns, haunts of Pan,
Where the ghosts of the daughters of Aglaurus
Dance on the grass before Athene's temple,
While fluttering flute-notes call
From Pan piping in the sunless cave!
There comes the girl Apollo loved,
Bringing his child, with bitter tears;
Leaves him as a feast for vultures, a prey to the bloody clav
To mock the cruel moment that begot him!
Many a song and story I have heard
Of sons that mortal women bore to the gods,
And not one tells of happiness.

Enter ION.

ION: Women – you have been waiting here by the templ
steps watching for your master – tell me, has Xuthus y
come out from the oracle, or is he still there making h
enquiry?

CHORUS: He has not come this way, Sir; he is still insid
But I hear a sound at the door; someone is coming out. Ye
here he comes; this is our master.

Enter XUTHUS; *he sees* ION, *and runs up to him.*

XUTHUS: My son! All happiness to you, my son! Before an
thing else I must wish you joy.

ION: Thank you, I am quite happy. If you will behave sensibly it will be the better for us both.

XUTHUS: Let me kiss you and embrace you!

ION: Sir, are you in your right mind, or has some god sent you mad?

XUTHUS: I have found what I longed for. Is it mad to show my love?

ION: Stop! Take your hands away – you will break my wreath.

XUTHUS: What does that matter? I'm no pirate! I've found you, and you belong to me.

ION: Stand off, before you get an arrow between your ribs.

XUTHUS: Why do you run away from me? Doesn't instinct tell you to love me?

ION: I don't love teaching strangers good behaviour. You are being vulgar and crazy.

XUTHUS: Very well, kill me – but you will have to bury me too: I'm your father!

ION: My father? You? Is this a joke?

XUTHUS: A joke? No! Isn't that plain? Don't you understand?

ION: What do you mean?

XUTHUS: I am your father! You are my son!

ION: Who says so?

XUTHUS: Apollo! It was for me that he brought you up.

ION: So you say; but –

XUTHUS: I heard the divine oracle –

ION: You heard some riddle and misunderstood it.

XUTHUS: Then I must be deaf or silly.

ION: What was Apollo's oracle?

XUTHUS: He said, whoever met me as I came out of the temple –

ION: Whoever met you – yes: what about him?

XUTHUS: – is my son!

ION: Your son by birth, or merely by gift?

XUTHUS: A gift, yes; but mine by birth too.

ION: And I was the first one you met?
XUTHUS: No one else, my dear boy!
ION: How could such a thing happen?
XUTHUS: I know; it puzzles me too.
ION [*with a sudden cry of joy*]: Ah! Then you know my moth
Who is she?
XUTHUS: I have no idea.
ION: Apollo said nothing?
XUTHUS: I didn't ask him; I was too delighted –
ION [*bitterly*]: Ha! another child of the earth!
XUTHUS: The earth doesn't bear children.
ION: But how can I be your son?
XUTHUS: I don't know. I'll ask Apollo.
ION: No. Let us try to reason it out further.
XUTHUS: Yes, that would be better.
ION: Did you have some love-affair?
XUTHUS: I was young once, and foolish.
ION: Before you married?
XUTHUS: Yes; never since.
ION: So that would be how you begot me?
XUTHUS: The time tallies.
ION: But then – it's a long way to Delphi: how did I co
here?
XUTHUS: I can't imagine. I feel bewildered.
ION: Were you ever in Delphi before?
XUTHUS: Yes, I came once for the Bacchic mysteries.
ION: Yes?
XUTHUS: And I was taken by my host, along with so
Delphian girls –
ION: To the revels, no doubt?
XUTHUS: Yes. They were in a state of – religious frenzy.
ION: Were you sober or drunk?
XUTHUS: I had enjoyed the celebrations.
ION: So that was my beginning!
XUTHUS: That is how Fate appointed it, my son!

ı: How did I come to the temple?
THUS: Probably the girl, to dispose of you –
ı: At least I am not slave-born!
THUS: So now, my son, accept your father.
ı: Naturally one believes the god ...
THUS: It is only sensible.
ı: After all, what more could I wish for –
THUS: Now you're seeing reason!
ı: – than a father who is descended from Zeus?
THUS: Exactly!
ı: And since he is my father, I must take his hand ...
THUS: The gods command it.
ı [*stonily*]: Greeting, Father!
THUS: I am happy to hear you say that.
ı [*unconvinced*]: This is a happy day.
THUS: Happy indeed for me.
ı: My mother, my dear mother! When shall I find you too? Whoever you are, I long to see you now more than before. erhaps you are dead, and it will never be possible.
ORUS: We of course share in the family rejoicing. Yet I ish Creusa too had been given the child she longs for, – a ue heir for the house of Erechtheus.
THUS: My son, Apollo has made good his oracle by uniting s: he has given you to me, and you now see your father for ıe first time. It is natural that you should want to find your ıother. I share your feeling – I want to see who bore me ıy son. Well, we must have patience; perhaps we shall find er one day. But meanwhile you must not live in the temple n charity any longer. Come with me to Athens, and take ıe position that I plan for you, as the son of a rich and owerful king. It is true there is a cloud over your birth; ut at least no one shall call you poor. Your wealth will stablish your blood as royal. – Have you nothing to say? Vhy do you stare at the ground, lost in thought? What is it? Vhy do you change all my happiness into fear?

ION: Things have one appearance when far away, and qu
another when looked at closely. I welcome the chance t
has discovered you as my father; but there are certain fa
that I realize now. The Athenians, I am told, are not settl
but a race born of their own soil; and I shall arrive am
them with two disadvantages, – my father a foreigner,
myself born, as you say, under a cloud. So long as I rem
without power, this disgrace will brand me as a nobody.
on the other hand, I struggle to be somebody in politics,
reach the front rank, I shall be hated by those who have
ability, – success is always unpopular; while those who h
ability, and could rise, will be clever enough to sit back
look on, and laugh at me for a busy fool inviting the slan
of the city. Established politicians will use their brains
their influence to frustrate my ambition. It is always
place and power have no mercy on a rival.

Then, your home is not mine: I am an alien. Your w
has no child; now, instead of sharing her sorrow with y
as before, she must bear it alone in bitterness of heart.
will hate me, and rightly. When she has no son, how co
she endure to see me stand next to my father's throne
you favour her, then you slight me; if you honour me, y
have your house in an uproar. Many a woman, when driv
to it, has used the knife or poison against her husband.
sides, Father, I pity her. She is your wife; she is growing
without any child. It is not right that she should have no h
to such a noble family.

As for being a king, it is overrated. Royalty conceal
life of torment behind a pleasant façade. To live in hou
fear, looking over your shoulder for the assassin – is th
paradise? Is it even good fortune? Give me the happiness
a plain man, not the life of a king, who loves to fill his co
with criminals, and hates honest men for fear of death. Y
may tell me the pleasure of being rich outweighs everythi
But to live surrounded by scandal, holding on to your mor

with both hands, beset by worry – has no appeal for me. A simple, untroubled life is what I want; that is what I have here, Father; and I have been happy. I enjoy the prime blessing of leisure; I am free from most annoyances; the unmannerly jostling of a city street, the humiliation of having to make way for the low rabble, – here I escape all this. Whether at prayers, or in conversation, the people I help are happy, not miserable. I welcome new guests, and enjoy their company, as they do mine, because it is always fresh; then I say good-bye to them as friends. Duty and nature alike have kept my life innocent – as a man should pray to be, even if he prays reluctantly – and fit for Apollo's service. So, weighing everything together, I value this life more than what you offer me, Father. Let me choose my own way! To allow me the humble life that I love, is as generous a gift as the pleasures of greatness.

HORUS: I am glad you want to stay here. That would certainly be the happiest thing for our dear mistress.

UTHUS: No more of this: learn to accept good fortune. I intend to celebrate a public feast of thanksgiving, here where I found you, and to offer the sacrifices I did not offer when you were born. For the present I shall entertain you not as my son, but as someone I am taking home with me on a visit, to see the sights of Athens. I don't wish to upset my wife, now that she remains childless while I have got what I wanted. Later on I shall choose a suitable opportunity, and persuade her to accept you as my heir. And I give you a new name, 'Ion', after our meeting, because you were the first to meet me as I came out of the temple. Now go and gather all your friends to the banquet, so that you may say good-bye to them before leaving Delphi. – You servants, say nothing about all this: if you speak one word to my wife, I will kill you.

ON: I will go. But there is one thing missing: I care nothing for all this, Father, unless I can find my mother. And, if I

might choose, I would like her to be an Athenian; then I should have free speech in my blood! A foreigner, coming to a city of unmixed race, must curb his speech: the law can enfranchise his name, but not his tongue.

Exeunt XUTHUS *and* ION.

CHORUS:

There will be tears for this! This day will cause
Gloomy rejoicings, tears among the applause,
When the Queen sees him happy with his son,
And knows herself left childless and alone.
Prophet Apollo, son of Leto! Why
Wrap up your chanted word in mystery?
Who is this youth reared in your temple halls?
In whose womb did he lie?
I do not like your answer: it rings false.
It is too simple. Where such chance may lead
I dare not think. This juggling makes no sense.
Why should chance choose this boy of alien breed?
There's trickery here! Who wants more evidence?

Women, shall we tell Creusa this?
Shout her husband's treason in her ear?
Every hope she had, poor soul,
Lay in him, was shared with him.
Now despair will drown her –
He sails on, successful!
She, his wife, dishonoured, sad,
Sinks to grey old age alone;
He, a wretch, an alien, came to Athens,
Walked into wealth, and gives no fair return.
Traitor to my mistress,
Curse him, traitor, curse him!
When he offers sacrifice and prayer,
When the holy flame flies up to heaven,
Then may gods ignore him,

May his prayer fall powerless!
He shall learn where my allegiance lies.

Now the time is near;
Soon the feast begins;
The new father comes with his new son.
Listen, peaks and ridges of Parnassus,
Enfolding high rock and cloudy seat,
Where Bacchus, with flaming torch held high in the night,
Swiftly leaps onward among his frenzied followers –
Let that boy never come to my city!
Let his new life be death to him!
Is Athens now so impoverished
That she welcomes foreign invasion?
Erechtheus founded our city,
And his family shall rule us!

ter CREUSA *with an old slave. They have to climb steps on to the stage, and* CREUSA *helps the old man up.*

REUSA: Come on, old friend! When my father was alive he trusted you to look after me; so you must come up to the temple, to share in my happiness, if the oracle has promised us children. When joy comes, it is good to have a friend to share it; and if sorrow comes – which God forbid – the deepest comfort is to see it reflected in the eyes of a friend. Yes, I am your mistress; but I am only returning the kindness you used to show my father.

AVE: My daughter, that's like you – and like your father. Your father was noble, a true son of Greek soil; and you're a credit to him. Yes, take my arm. Pull – pull me! Prophecy lives up a steep hill, eh? I'm worn out; you must patch me up. Your legs are young.

REUSA: This way; mind where you place your foot.

AVE: There! I try to go faster than I can.

REUSA: Feel the ground with your stick.

SLAVE: Well, if I'm short-sighted, my stick's blind!

CREUSA: Yes, I know. Don't give up, now.

SLAVE: Not if I can help it. But I can't use strength I haven
got.

CREUSA [*turning to the Chorus*]: Women: we have so ofte
worked together at our weaving, that I trust you as friend
though you are slaves. I see my husband has gone – tell m
what is appointed for us? What answer did he get to ou
question? Shall we have children? Make me happy wi
good news, and I will show you my gratitude.

CHORUS: Oh, gods!

SLAVE: That's a bad beginning.

CHORUS: My poor lady!

SLAVE: You mean the oracle gave my master bad news?

CHORUS: Well, what are we going to do? It means life o
death!

CREUSA: Why do you say that? What are you afraid of?

CHORUS: Shall we tell her? Or say nothing? What shall w
do?

CREUSA: Tell me. I understand: you have bad news fo
me.

CHORUS: You shall be told, even if I die twice over. My lad
you will never hold children in your arms or put them t
your breast.

CREUSA: Oh! Let me die!

SLAVE: My daughter ...

CREUSA: This answer has broken my heart, I cannot bear i
I will not live!

SLAVE: Oh, my child, my child!

CREUSA: Despair stabs me through like a sharp pain.

SLAVE: Yet wait! Keep your tears till we know whether –

CREUSA: Now is the time for tears. What more is there t
know?

SLAVE: Whether your husband has bad news too: does he bea
this blow with you, or do you suffer alone?

CHORUS: Apollo has given Xuthus a son. He has his good fortune to himself; Creusa is left out of it.

CREUSA: Oh! this is the bitterest of all! Why did you tell me?

SLAVE: This son you speak of – did the oracle say he was to be born of some woman, or is he born already?

CHORUS: He is already born and grown to manhood! Apollo presented him to Xuthus here before our eyes!

CREUSA: What? Impossible! Incredible!

SLAVE: Impossible indeed! Tell me more exactly – how was the oracle put into effect? Who is this young man?

CHORUS: Apollo promised to Xuthus, for a son, the first person to meet him as he came out of the sanctuary.

CREUSA: His son! [*She sobs aloud.*] But I may go childless, there is no son for me, my house remains an empty desert!

SLAVE: Then whom did the god mean? Who met him? – My poor lady! – Where and how did he find him?

CHORUS: Dear Mistress, you remember the lad who was sweeping the temple here? It is that same lad!

CREUSA: Oh! if I could but soar up through the melting sky, far from the land of Greece, beyond the Western stars! ... Have pity on me, friends; you see what I suffer.

SLAVE: What name is his father giving him? Has he said, or is it not decided yet?

CHORUS: Yes, he is calling him 'Ion', because he was the first to meet him.

SLAVE: Who was his mother?

CHORUS: We don't know. But – I will tell you all I can – Xuthus has gone now to have a tent set up and a banquet arranged for his new son. He is saying nothing about it to our mistress. He will entertain Ion as a friend; but in fact he intends to offer the sacrifices due at the birth of a son.

SLAVE: My lady, I feel as you do: we have been betrayed by your husband. This is a deliberate scheme to insult us and oust us from Erechtheus' palace! I am not speaking from any

dislike of your husband, but because I love you better. Why, it's clear enough now: after coming and planting himself on Athens – a foreigner – and marrying you, and taking over your palace and everything you inherited, he goes and secretly breeds children with another woman, – yes, secretly; listen: when he saw you were childless, he was not content to be childless too and share your misfortune. No, he went behind your back to some slave-woman, and from her got this boy; sent him away from Athens; gave him to some Delphian to bring up. For secrecy, the boy is dedicated to service in the temple, and is educated there. Now, when your husband knows him to be full-grown, he persuades you to come here enquiring about children. It was not Apollo who told lies, but your husband: he was rearing the boy all the time! And see the plot he laid so carefully: if he were found out, – it was the god's responsibility; if not, if time went safely by, he would fetch him and invest him with the royal power of Athens; and his name, Ion, after all this time he passes off as a new name given because of the way he met him.

CHORUS: How I hate such men! They contrive malicious mischief, and cunningly cloak it over. Poor and honest makes a better friend than clever and treacherous.

SLAVE: Now, to crown all, you are to have this nobody, this slave's brat, brought along to lord it in your house! Why, it would at least have been a single insult if he had got himself a son and heir from a free-born woman, – after asking your permission, and in view of your barrenness; and if you objected to that, well, he ought to have married one of his own race. Now you must do something: show yourself a woman! Kill your husband and his son, before they put an end to you! Either use a sword, or do it indirectly, or by poison. I mean it, – if you flinch you will lose your own life. If two enemies come to live in the same house, it's bound to be the worse for one or the other. I'll help you do it: I can

slip in where the boy's preparing the feast and stab him. You've been a good mistress to me, and I owe it to you, if it costs me my life. Yes, it's only the name of slave that carries disgrace with it; in every other point a loyal slave is as good as a free man.

CHORUS: My dear mistress, I will be loyal too; I am with you in this, whether for life or death.

CREUSA:

My soul, how can I keep silence?
Yet, how strip off shame, and show
That lustful act in open light?
What is left now to hinder me?
What prim glance now could make me blush?
My husband has turned traitor!
I have no home now, no child; no hope left now.
I thought, if I hid my ravishing,
If I hid my baby's birth, and all my tears,
I could bring those hopes to fulfilment;
But I could not. Now by the starry throne of Zeus,
By the Guardian of the Rock of Athens,
By the holy shore of the Tritonian Lake,
I will ease the load from my heart,
Hold my secret no longer.
With tears falling from my eyes, my soul tormented
By the scheming cruelty of man and god alike,
Who demand love and give treachery in return –
I will expose them!
Listen, Apollo, you who can wake to song
The seven strings of your lifeless lyre
Till they chant immortal music to lonely shepherds, –
Here in the white light of heaven I denounce you!
You came to me, with the gleam of gold in your hair,
As I was picking an armful of yellow flowers
Whose petals, pinned on my dress, mirrored the same golden gleam;

You gripped my bloodless wrists,
Dragged me, shrieking for help, into the cave,
Bore me to the ground – a god without shame or remorse!
And had your will, – for the honour of Aphrodite!

I bore you a son; and, in dread of my mother's eye,
With many tears I laid him
On the same cruel bed where you ravished me.
Where is he now, our little child?
Torn and devoured! – and why should you
Lay down your bragging lyre, or stop your song?

Listen to me, Apollo, seated at the earth's centre,
Dispensing oracles from your golden throne, –
I shout it in your ear: vile betrayer!
My husband never did you service,
Yet you give him a son to inherit his house,
While my child – yes, and yours – like a beast you leave to die,
To be torn by vultures from the crib where his mother laid him.
Your very birth-place hates you,
Your sacred laurel and soft palm-tree hate you,
Where Leto laboured in her holy labour
And bore you, the Son of Zeus!

CHORUS: What treasure of suffering is here laid bare! Who would not weep for her?

SLAVE: My daughter, the look in your eyes makes me grieve for you; but I do not understand. There I am, weeping because you have no children, when you take me by surprise with a very different story; you leave to-day's unhappiness and wander off into the past looking for other trouble. What is this? What do you accuse Apollo of? You had a child, you say? What child? You left him somewhere in Athens, for beasts to bury? Tell me again.

REUSA: I will tell you; though I am ashamed – you have known me so long.

AVE: I can sympathize all the better.

REUSA: Listen, then. You know a cave on the North side of the Acropolis, – a place called the Long Rocks?

AVE: I know; there is a temple of Pan, and an altar.

REUSA: It was there that I suffered a terrible ordeal.

AVE: Suffered? What? There are tears in my eyes already.

REUSA: Apollo ... raped me.

AVE: Oh my daughter! Then – that was what I noticed?

REUSA: What did you notice? If you are right I will tell you.

AVE: You were ill and miserable, but you kept it to yourself.

REUSA: That was what I tell you of now.

AVE: But – how did you hide what had happened?

REUSA: I bore a child. – Why should you have to listen to all this? – but be patient!

AVE: Where? Who helped you? Or did you go through that alone?

REUSA: Alone; in the same cave where –

AVE: But where is he now? You need not be childless any longer!

REUSA: Dead. Given to the beasts.

AVE: Dead? Apollo was brutal enough to allow that?

REUSA: He allowed it. My son has Death for a father.

AVE: Who exposed the child? Not ... you?

REUSA: Yes. In the night I wrapped him in a royal shawl; no one knew what I was doing; I was alone with Fate and darkness. I left him there in the cave – how could I bear to do it? I said my pitiful good-bye to him, steeling my heart to cruelty.

AVE: Cruel! but Apollo was crueller.

REUSA: You would have said so, if you had seen him stretch out his hands to me, reaching for my breast, feeling for my arms, wanting his rightful place, which I took from him.

SLAVE: What were you hoping for when you left him?

CREUSA: That Apollo would care for his own son.

SLAVE: A noble, flourishing house – how it has fallen!

CREUSA: Friend, why do you cover your face and weep?

SLAVE: Because you and the royal line are brought low, and have lived to see it.

CREUSA: That is our mortal fate. Nothing is permanent.

SLAVE: We must stop weeping, my dear. There are oth things to think of.

CREUSA: What things? Misery drives out other thoughts.

SLAVE: The first to wrong you was Apollo. Take your reveng

CREUSA: What can I do against the power of a god?

SLAVE: Set fire to this holy temple!

CREUSA: I dare not. I suffer enough already.

SLAVE: If that's impossible, – kill your husband!

CREUSA: No; he has been a good husband to me in the pas

SLAVE: Well, then: this boy who is foisted on you!

CREUSA: If I could ... How? ... Yes!

SLAVE: Provide your servants with swords –

CREUSA: I will. Where shall they do it?

SLAVE: In the tent where Ion's entertaining his friends.

CREUSA: No: too open, and – with slaves – too uncertain.

SLAVE: If you're afraid, I give it up. Think of something you self.

CREUSA: I have a way – secret and certain.

SLAVE: Both good things – and I'll help.

CREUSA: Listen, then. You have heard of the war of th Earth-born Giants against the gods, among the Thracia volcanoes?

SLAVE: Yes.

CREUSA: At that time the Earth, to help her children an dismay the gods, produced that fearful monster, the Gorgon which was killed by Athene, daughter of Zeus. Now th fierce and terrifying beast was armed with a snake whic coiled round it like a breastplate –

AVE: I remember the story – Athene wears the skin of this snake on her breast, and they call it the Aegis, or Athene's robe, since the day she won it in the battle of the gods – well, now can that injure your enemies?

REUSA: Erichthonius – you know whom I mean? – my grandfather, first of my race, born from the earth, – when still an infant, received from Athene a gift –

AVE: Yes – what? Why do you hesitate?

REUSA: Two drops of blood from the dead Gorgon, which have miraculous power upon the human body: the one kills, the other heals.

AVE: Yes, I have heard: the drops were in a phial which she hung round the child's neck by a golden chain.

REUSA: Erichthonius gave that phial to my father; when he died it passed to me; and I wear it here on my wrist. [*She shows it.*]

AVE: And how are these two opposite effects brought about? How must the drops be used?

REUSA: The drop which fell from the hollow vein repels disease and nourishes life. The other –

AVE: Yes?

REUSA: – is the poison of the Gorgon snakes. It kills.

AVE: And the two are not mixed? You have them separate?

REUSA: Nothing could mingle them. They are good and evil.

AVE: My dear child, you have everything you need!

REUSA: He shall die by the poison; and you shall be the poisoner.

AVE: Only tell me how and where: I'll do it.

REUSA: Do it – in Athens, as soon as he reaches my house.

AVE: You disliked my plan: I think yours is unwise.

REUSA: Why? You see a risk? – Ah, yes!

AVE: You will be called the murderer, even if you're innocent.

REUSA: Of course: the jealous stepmother.

AVE: Kill him here, where you can deny any hand in it.

CREUSA: Yes. The sooner it comes, the sweeter.

SLAVE: And you'll cheat your husband just where he mean cheat you.

CREUSA: Now listen carefully. Here is the gold bracelet fr my wrist, the same piece of work that Athene gave us m years past: go with it to these furtive celebrations of husband's; and when the feast is over, and they are going make libation to the gods, take it from under your cloak a pour this drop [*she points to one of the phials*] into the yo man's cup. Make no mistake; keep his cup separate. Thi for the would-be lord of my palace – and for no one el This once down his throat, he will never reach glori Athens; he will stay in Delphi, dead!

SLAVE: Now you go back to your lodging; I'll carry out orders. I'm not so young as I was; but when work's to done I'm young enough, I can laugh at old age. You want kill him, to rid your palace of him – then I'm your man Ha! murder, is it? Those who have no troubles may w keep their hands clean; but there's no law that can sta between a man and his enemy.

Exeunt CREUSA *and* SLAVE *severally*.

CHORUS:

Hecate, Goddess of darkened ways, [*Stroph*
Queen of wandering ghosts that haunt the night,
Visit this day with deadly power,
Guide the cup that my lady Creusa sends,
Blended with blood
Caught from the Gorgon's gory throat –
Guide the cup to his thirsty lips,
Who comes to usurp Erechtheus' palace!
Let the true royal house,
Free from all alient taint,
Hold for ever the throne and power of Athens!

What if her plans miscarry? [*Antistrophe*

If Death aim wide, and the daring moment pass?
If the hope she builds on crumbles?
Then she will die, by the sword or the knotted cord;
Pain will end pain;
She will enter the unfamiliar world.
How could Creusa, proud, a queen,
Live and see in the light of day
A foreign prince rule from her father's throne?

We should be shamed before the God of Songs [*Strophe* 2
If, in our holy Festival of Spring,
When all night long we sing to Bacchus and watch
The dancing by torchlight on the river-bank,
When the starry sky dances with us, and the moon dances,
And the fifty Nereid nymphs come from the sea
And from the tumbling of eternal streams
To adore the Holy Mother and the Maid of the golden crown –
Would it not shame us all
If then Apollo's foundling stood among us
Sharing the raptures of that holy night –
He who hopes to inherit wealth
Won by the toil of Kings of Athens?

[*They turn to the audience.*]

Look now, you who with changeless songs [*Antistrophe* 2
Slander us women as unchaste,
Breaking man's law and God's to taste
Forbidden joys: to you belongs
This censure! See how the uncounted wrongs
Man's lust commits debase him far beneath
Our innocence. Truth sings
Another tune, and flings
Men's taunts of lustfulness back in their teeth.
See, here, this man; who, childless, will not share
My lady's grief, but bids his pleasure rove,

Enjoys another, secret love,
And rears a bastard child to be his heir!

Enter a MESSENGER, *another slave of* CREUSA

MESSENGER: Women, where shall I find the Queen, my
tress? I have looked everywhere in the town without fin
her.

CHORUS: What is the matter, friend? Why are you in su
hurry? What have you to tell her?

MESSENGER: They are after us. The authorities are loo
for Creusa, to stone her to death.

CHORUS: What? O gods! Is it found out, then – the plo
laid to kill the young man?

MESSENGER: You knew? Then you're in as much dange
anyone.

CHORUS: How was the plot discovered?

MESSENGER: Apollo contrived it – to avoid pollution.

CHORUS: What happened? For the gods' sake tell us ev
thing. Even if we lose our lives it would be better not to
in ignorance.

MESSENGER: As soon as Xuthus left the temple with his
son for the feast he was preparing, he went off to the mo
tain where they perform the torchlight dance of Bacchus
offer a sacrifice of blood at the Twin Peaks, in place of
ritual he neglected when the boy was born. He told Ion
stay behind and get workmen to erect a huge tent. 'M
your sacrifice,' he said, 'to the gods of birth; and if I
away long, let your friends who have come begin the b
quet.' So Xuthus took victims and went.

Ion rose to the occasion. He stretched a great awning
upright poles, taking care to avoid the full fire of the
either at noon or in the dying blaze of evening. He measu
it out as a square of a hundred feet each way, large enough
entertain the whole town. Then he took woven tapest
from the temple storehouse, of marvellous workmansh
and hung them from the awning. First, spread across the r

ke a great wing, was a curtain which Heracles took as spoil
om the Amazons and brought as an offering to Apollo.
nd there was a design woven in the cloth – Heaven mar-
alling the stars in the round sky; the Sun in his chariot,
iving down to his last blaze, drawing after him the evening
ar; Night in her black cloak driving a single pair; with the
ars following behind, the Pleiads in mid-course, and Orion
e swordsman, while above went Arcturus waving his golden
il; there was the round full moon darting upwards when
e month divides; the Hyades, whose warning every sailor
usts, and Dawn with his torch chasing the stars away.
ound the walls Ion hung different tapestries, from the East,
owing Persian and Greek ships in battle; creatures half-
ast, half-man, men chasing deer on horseback, or stalking
ons in the desert. Then again, right at the entrance was
ecrops in the form of a coiled serpent, and his daughters
r him, – the gift of some Athenian.

In the middle of the tent, ready for the banquet, Ion had
aced wine-bowls of gold; and now a herald made a pro-
amation, raising himself on tip-toe, inviting any Delphian
ho wished to come to the feast. As soon as the place was
ll they put garlands on their heads and enjoyed the lavish
eal that was provided. When they had eaten to their
art's content, into the space in the middle came my lady's
d attendant, bustling about and making the guests laugh.
e brought jugs and poured out water for washing hands, he
urnt resin to scent the air, he set the wine-cups going
und, taking all the work upon himself. When the time
me for music and general drinking, he cried, 'Take away
ose little cups! Bring big ones, to make the company jolly
ore quickly!' So we were handing round gold cups and
ver cups among the crowd; and he chose a special cup,
a compliment to the new prince, filled it, and put in
e wine a deadly poison which they say Creusa gave him to
ll the lad. Ion and all the rest were standing with the

cups in their hands, when one of the slaves spoke an unl word. Ion, of course, brought up by priests in a ten recognized a bad omen and told them to fill the cups with fresh wine; then he poured out the first cupful o ground and told everyone else to do the same. There v silence, and we filled the cups again with Byblian wine water.

While we were doing so, a flock of doves – they live about the temple – flew into the tent. They dipped beaks eagerly into the pools of poured-out wine, and ti it down their pretty throats. They all drank the holy li unharmed, except one, which had flown down where new prince emptied his cup. The bird sipped; at onc whole body shook; it was convulsed; then it uttere extraordinary scream of agony. The whole compan amazement watched the bird writhing; it struggled; lay dead; its purple claws dropped.

Ion threw off his cloak, leapt over the table, and shou 'Who was trying to murder me? Out with it, old mar was you who were so eager to hand me the cup.' The seized him by the arm and began searching him for proo his guilt; and proof was found. Only under torture di confess how he had plotted with Creusa to kill by poi Thereupon Ion, followed by his guests, ran straight from tent to the high court of Delphi and laid his charge be them. 'Lords of the holy city,' he cried, 'this Athe woman, the daughter of Erechtheus, has attempted my with poison!' The Delphian lords by a large majority tenced my mistress to death by flinging from a rock for n der attempted within the precincts against a consecr person. All Delphi is looking for her. Poor lady! She c to this temple out of her longing for children; now, thro resolving on this pitiful course, she has thrown away b the hope of children and her own life.

Exit the MESSENGER.

ORUS:
Oh, there is no escape for us,
No escape from a cruel death!
Guilt is proved, proof is certain –
There was the murderous wine, mingled
With the swift snake's venomous drops.
Death is certain too – our lives
Are already marked for the doom of blood,
Our mistress' flesh for the shattering rock!
How to escape? Through the soaring air,
Through pitchy crannies deep in the earth?
Clatter of hooves and wheels like wind,
Or a plunging prow? Away, away
From the rocky death and avenging blood!

Nothing can be secret but what God keeps secret.
) my mistress, what suffering now awaits you?
What shall *we* suffer, who plotted malice against our neighbour?
Will not Justice repay us?

Enter CREUSA.

EUSA: Women, they are after me to kill me! Apollo's ourt demanded my life; I am in their hands.
ORUS: We have heard what happened – what danger you re in.
EUSA: Where can I go? I barely got out of the house in me; then I slipped along without being seen – and here I am.
ORUS: Why – the altar, of course!
EUSA: How will that help?
ORUS: Kneel there, and they dare not touch you.
EUSA: But the law condemns me to death.
ORUS: Not until they lay hands on you. [*Shouts are heard pproaching.*]
EUSA: Here they come, with swords, raging and relentss.

CHORUS: Crouch at the altar. If they kill you there they blood-guilty.

Enter ION, *followed by an infuriated crowd.*

ION: Father Cephisus, river of Athens! What viper is this have spawned? A flaming serpent that murders with a lo What utter audacity – as venomous as the Gorgon poison tried to kill me with! Seize her! Throw her from Parnas send her bounding down the cliff-ledges, let the crags co out her dainty hair! The gods were kind, and saved me fr going to Athens to put myself in a stepmother's power. stead I have taken your measure here, among friends, discovered the depth of your criminal malice. You wo have made short work of me, once you had me trapped your house. – No, the altar shall not save you, nor Apoll temple. My claim for protection is stronger than yours – say nothing of my mother; for if I have no mother in flesh I still have one in name. – See how she weaves wick ness with cunning to serve her ends: to escape the pena of her crime she kneels at the very altar of God!

CREUSA: I forbid you to kill me – forbid you in my own ri and in Apollo's, whose temple this is.

ION: You and Apollo! What can you have in common?

CREUSA: I here dedicate my body to him.

ION: Yet you were trying to poison his servant!

CREUSA: His? You were no longer his. You belong to yo father.

ION: Xuthus begot me; but my real father is Apollo.

CREUSA: You *were* Apollo's; but you have ceased to belo to him. I have taken your place.

ION: How can you? You are guilty, I was innocent!

CREUSA: I guilty? You are an enemy of my house.

ION: I never took arms against Athens.

CREUSA: You did. You were setting Erechtheus' palace fire.

ION: Fire! What fire? What do you mean?

REUSA: You were coming to instal yourself forcibly in my place.

ON: My father has a right to give me what he won.

REUSA: What right had the son of Aeolus in Athens?

ON: He saved Athens; and by arms, not arguments.

REUSA: He was an ally; does that make him a citizen?

ON: If you ask that, why kill *me* for fear of my hopes?

REUSA: To save my own life I had to strike first.

ON: Because you are childless you grudge me to my father.

REUSA: Because I am childless must you snatch my home from me?

ON: Surely I had some right there as a son!

REUSA: Your right there is – his sword and shield, no more!

ON: Get up! Leave that holy altar!

REUSA: Keep your advice for your mother, wherever she is!

ON: Do you hope to escape the punishment of murder?

REUSA: Yes, unless you mean to shed blood in the sanctuary.

ON: Why do you choose to die at an altar?

REUSA: At least it will hurt Apollo who has hurt me.

ON: Ha! The laws gods make for men, – what strange error, what folly! Criminals should not take refuge at an altar, they should be driven away! No tainted hand should touch anything sacred. Sanctuary should be for the innocent when they are wronged. As it is, good and bad come with the same claim, and the gods give both the same privilege!

Enter from the temple the Delphian PRIESTESS.

RIESTESS: Stop, my son! I have come from the prophetic tripod, past the temple wall, to speak to you. [*To* CHORUS.] I am the priestess of Apollo, chosen from all Delphi to preserve the tradition of this ancient oracle.

ON: My dearest mother! – although only in name.

RIESTESS: So I am called. So I like to be called.

ON: Have you heard? She plotted to murder me!

RIESTESS: I have heard. . . . Your cruel rage is a sin.

ON: A sin? To take a life for a life?

PRIESTESS: A wife always dislikes a stepson.

ION: Dislikes! My stepmother hates me to death!

PRIESTESS: Hush! You are leaving the temple and going t
your home –

ION: Then why must I still take advice?

PRIESTESS: You must come as a blessing to Athens; you mu
come with clean hands.

ION: A man who kills his enemy is clean.

PRIESTESS: No, my son. I have something to tell you.

ION: Tell me; I know you will speak from a kind heart.

PRIESTESS: You see what I am carrying?

ION: I see an old cradle trimmed like something consecrated

PRIESTESS: It was in this that I first found you as a new-bor
baby. I have kept it hidden; now you may see it.

ION: What? This is a new detail in my history. Why have yo
kept it secret so long?

PRIESTESS: Apollo wished you to serve in his temple.

ION: Does he wish that no longer? How am I to know?

PRIESTESS: He has declared whose son you are; in doing s
he dismisses you from Delphi.

ION: Were you told to keep this? Why did you?

PRIESTESS: Apollo put it in my mind at the time –

ION: Yes? Go on!

PRIESTESS: To keep it until – to-day.

ION: And what good or what harm does it hold for me?

PRIESTESS: In this cradle are your infant clothes. Look!

ION: They will help me to find my mother!

PRIESTESS: Yes; it is Heaven's will now. Before it was not.

ION: I am so glad you have shown me these things.

PRIESTESS: Take them. Search for your mother and find her

ION: Search? ... All over Asia and Europe?

PRIESTESS: You must decide where. I reared you, my son, fo
Apollo. By his will – though not his command – I receive
these tokens and kept them; now I give them back to you
Why Apollo wished it I cannot say; no other human bein

knew that I had these things or where they were hidden. . . . Good-bye; I kiss you as if you were really my son. Think first where you should begin the search for your mother. Was it a Delphian girl who laid you here at the temple door? Was she a Greek? There is no more that I can tell you, nor even Apollo, who has had his part in your story.

The PRIESTESS *retires and stands by the temple door.*

ION: My poor mother! I cannot keep back tears as I think of that day when she put away from her the fruit of her secret shame, withheld her breast from me, left me to be reared as a nameless temple slave. Apollo was kind, but Fate cruel. All the years when I should have lived happy in the comfort of her arms, I was denied the sweetness of a mother's care. She, too, lost all the joy of motherhood, and suffered the same bitter loneliness. – There may be things I would not want to discover: I will dedicate this cradle to Apollo, and know nothing! If my mother was a slave it would be better to leave her unfound. – Apollo, I dedicate to you this. . . . What am I doing? Apollo kept these tokens for me, and I am opposing his purpose! I must open it and take the risk. Nothing that I do can stop the course of Fate. – What secret have you for me under these holy knots? You have treasured here the love that I owe – to whom? [*He opens the cradle.*] Look! These wrappings are not stained with age, there is no mould on the basket-work – this is the hand of God! And it has been treasured so many years!

CREUSA: What? Let me look! I cannot believe my eyes!

ION: Be silent! I have already had enough of your –

CREUSA: Silent – not I! Don't tell me what to do! That is the cradle I left you in, – yes, you, my child! You were my little baby then! I will leave the altar, though I die for it!

ION: Take her, hold her! Apollo has driven her mad, she has left the altar. Bind her arms!

CREUSA: Go on, kill me, kill me! I have this cradle and what it holds; I have you, and I will not let you go!

ION: This is outrageous! With one word she takes possession.

CREUSA: But I have found you – your mother! You are my dear son!

ION: Your dear son! And you were plotting my murder!

CREUSA: Should you not be dear to your mother?

ION: Stop play-acting! [*He wraps up the cradle again.*] I'll soon trap you.

CREUSA: Try! Test me! That's all I ask, my son.

ION: Is this cradle empty or not?

CREUSA: It contains the clothes I left you in.

ION: Can you tell me what they are, before you look?

CREUSA: Yes. If I fail, I accept my death.

ION: Tell me, then. You are very confident.

CREUSA: You will find there a thing I wove when I was a girl.

ION: That might be anything. What was it like?

CREUSA: It was unfinished. You could see it was done by someone just learning to weave.

ION: You shall not catch me like that. What was the pattern?

CREUSA: In the middle of the cloth, a Gorgon –

ION: O Zeus! Is Fate tracking me down?

CREUSA: And it has a fringe of snakes, like Athene's aegis.

ION: Look: here is the cloth. It is as you describe it.

CREUSA: My own weaving! How long since!

ION: Is there anything else, or is that your one lucky guess?

CREUSA: Yes! The golden serpents – they were Athene's gift long ago; by her command every child has them. They are copies of those she gave to Erichthonius.

ION: Tell me, how is this ornament put on, used?

CREUSA: It is hung from the neck of a new-born child.

ION: The golden serpents are here! ... Tell me what the third thing is!

CREUSA: I put on you that day a wreath of leaves from the olive-tree which Athene first brought to the Rock of Athens. If it is there, it can never lose its freshness, it comes from the virgin olive-tree, it will be green still!

The PRIESTESS *goes in.*

ION: Mother, my dearest Mother! At last I can kiss you! What happiness, what happiness!

CREUSA: My child! Dearer to me than the sun's own light – God will forgive me! – I thought I should never see you, I thought you had made your home below the earth, among the dead, with Persephone; and now I have you in my arms!

ION: Dear Mother, I was dead, and am alive again; and your arms are round me.

CREUSA: Bright enfolding arch of sky,
Where are words to voice my heart?
Can a moment change despair to ecstasy,
Fill my world with pleasures?

ION: Mother, there is nothing I could have less expected to happen, than that I should prove to be your son.

CREUSA: Still I tremble, still I fear –

ION: Why fear? You have me safe.

CREUSA: Till this moment, so complete was my despair.
Priestess! Tell me,
Whose hand brought my darling to this temple?
From whose arms
Did your arms receive him?

ION: It was a miracle. But let us hope that future happiness will repay us for all we have suffered in the past.

CREUSA: My son, with tears I bore you;
With sobs I put you from me.
Now your cheek is resting close beside my own;
My joy is more than mortal!

ION: Your words speak my own happiness, Mother.

CREUSA: No more childless, no more barren!
Now my empty palace is my home!
The royalty of Athens flowers again!
Erechtheus lives, his youth restored!
No longer darkness lowers
Over the Earth-born race: the sun has risen!

ION: Mother, my father should be here to share in this joy that I have brought to you both.

CREUSA: O son, my son, what have you said? The truth is out now, – and what a truth!

ION: What do you mean?

CREUSA: You have another father; not Xuthus.

ION: Oh! ... I was a love-child before your marriage?

CREUSA: There were no torches and no dances at your begetting, my son, nor at your birth.

ION: Then the worst is true: I am of common blood! Who was my father?

CREUSA: I swear to you by Athene who killed the Gorgon –

ION: Why are you saying this?

CREUSA: – who has her temple on the Acropolis at home, where she planted the sacred olive –

ION: What is this mystery? Are you deceiving me?

CREUSA: There, by a rock where nightingales sang, Apollo stole upon me –

ION: Apollo?

CREUSA: – and lay with me.

ION: Mother! But ... your news is good!

CREUSA: When the time came I bore Apollo a son – you!

ION: What joy this is, if ... if it is true.

CREUSA: This shawl was all I had, girl as I was, to wrap you in – a thing I made playing with my loom. I gave you no milk from my breast, I neither fed nor washed you as a mother should; but left you in the lonely cave to die, a feast for the cruel birds.

ION: Mother, how could you do it?

CREUSA: I was in the grip of terror ... I did not want to kill you.

ION: And just now I was trying to murder you – how horrible!

CREUSA: Yes. Then, long ago, in the cave; to-day, here, at the altar: both horrible! How our lives are tossed about this way and that with the shifting gales of fortune and mis-

fortune! Now for a steady wind! We have suffered enough, my son; now we have a clear voyage forward out of all our troubles!

CHORUS: After to-day, nothing can ever again seem strange or unexpected.

ION: Goddess of change, blind Chance, disposing countless human lives to misery or fortune, how narrowly I have escaped this horror of taking my own mother's life, and she mine! [*A deep sigh.*] Is it, after all, possible to understand everything that is involved here, to see it clearly in the searching light of the sun? ... Mother: to have found you is a dear happiness; and to be Apollo's son is beyond all my hopes; but there is something I want to say to you alone. [*Draws her aside.*] Come; this is a private matter between us two – anything you tell me shall be as secret as the grave. Are you certain that you did not – as many a girl does – they cannot help it – become infatuated and yield to a secret love, and then lay responsibility on the god, and to avoid bringing disgrace on me, say that Apollo was my father when he was not?

CREUSA: I swear to you by the victorious Athene, who fought in her chariot at the side of Zeus against the Giants, – no mortal man is your father, my son, but Apollo who reared you.

ION: Then, how came Apollo to give his own son to be son to another man, and say that Xuthus was my father?

CREUSA: Not your real father. You are Apollo's son, and he gave you to Xuthus, as any man might give his own son to a friend to provide him with an heir.

ION: Are Apollo's oracles truth or lies? This troubles me, Mother, as well it may.

CREUSA: This is how I see it, my son: it is out of kindness that Apollo is establishing you in a royal house. Suppose we openly claimed Apollo as your father: you would never have inherited our royal house, nor would his fatherhood be

acknowledged. How could it be, when I myself conceale my union with him, and secretly left you to die? No; Apol gives you to Xuthus for your own good.

ION: That is mere trifling. I am looking for a better answer. will go into the temple and ask Apollo himself whose son am.

ATHENE *appears above.*

– Ah! What god is this, rising above the temple with h face towards the East? Come away, Mother, we must n look on the face of a god, unless – unless perhaps it is timel that we should.

ATHENE: Stay! Why should you fly from me as from a enemy? I am your friend here as in Athens, the city whos name I bear – I am Athene! I have come in haste fro Apollo. He thought it right not to appear to you himsel lest there should be reproaches openly uttered for what past; so he sends me with this message to you. Ion, this your mother, and Apollo is your father. Xuthus did not be get you, but Apollo gave you to him so that you migh become the recognized heir of an illustrious house. Whe Apollo's purpose in this matter was disclosed [*she looks dis approvingly at the* CHORUS] he contrived a way to save eac of you from death at the other's hands. His intention ha been to keep the truth secret for a while, and then in Athen to reveal Creusa as your mother, and you as her son b Apollo. However, to complete the business for which I har nessed my chariot to come here, listen now to Apollo' prophecies.

Creusa: take your son home with you to Athens, and give him the place and power of royalty; he is descended from Erechtheus, and it is his right to rule my land. He shall be famous throughout Greece; he shall have four sons, who shall give their names to the four tribes and regions of my mountain country, the Geleontes, Hopletes, Argades, and one tribe named after my aegis the Aegicores. They in their

turn shall have sons who in the appointed course of time shall found cities on the islands of the Cyclades and on the mainland coasts, to lend their strength to my city. They shall colonize the lowlands on either side of the strait that divides Europe from Asia; called after this prince, they shall bear the glorious name of Ionians. Moreover, you and Xuthus too shall have sons: first Dorus, from whom shall spring the celebrated Dorian State; then Achaeus, who shall be king of the sea-coast by Rhium in Peloponnese, and set the seal of his name upon a nation.

So, Apollo has done all things well: first, he gave you a healthy labour and so enabled you to conceal the birth of your son; then when he was born and you abandoned him in his cradle, Apollo instructed Hermes to take the infant in his arms and transport him to Delphi; here he preserved his life and brought him up.

Now, tell no one that Ion is your true son; so that Xuthus may enjoy his delusion, and you may enjoy the happiness that you know to be yours. So, joy be with you all! Your troubles are over; from this day your good fortune begins.

ON: Athene, daughter of Almighty Zeus, we accept your words and shall not refuse belief. I believe that I am the son of Creusa and of Apollo. Even before you came I could believe that.

REUSA: Now I will make my confession! Before, I blamed Apollo: now I bless him because, though for so long he did nothing, now he gives my son back to me. Before, I hated this holy temple: now its porch smiles upon me, I caress this dear doorway, and touch every stone with delight.

THENE: You have changed your curses into blessings: you do well. The ways of gods are slow; but in the end their power is shown.

REUSA: Come, my son, let us set out for home.

THENE: Go, and I will follow.

REUSA: Faithful friend of Athens, guard our journey!

ATHENE [*to* ION]: Take the throne of your fathers! [I
stands silent.]

CREUSA: I take my just and honourable possession! [*Her ha*
is on ION'S *shoulder, but still he does not respond.* ATHE
disappears. Exeunt CREUSA *and* ION.]

CHORUS: Farewell, Apollo, Son of Zeus and Leto! [
CHORUS *begin to leave the stage, while the leader speaks.*] I
any man whose life is pursued by misfortune reverence t
gods and take courage. For in the end good men receive t
reward they deserve; but evil natures beget evil fortun
and to them happiness can never come.

Exeunt.

THE WOMEN OF TROY

*

Characters:

POSEIDON, *God of the Sea*
ATHENE, *a goddess*
HECABE, *widow of Priam King of Troy*
CHORUS *of captive Trojan women*
TALTHYBIUS, *a Greek herald*
CASSANDRA, *daughter of Hecabe*
ANDROMACHE, *daughter-in-law of Hecabe*
MENELAUS, *a general of the Greek army*
HELEN, *his wife*

*

e: The ruins of Troy, two days after the city's capture, before awn. First are seen only silhouettes of shattered buildings against red glow and rising smoke; then light falls on the god POSEI-ON.

EIDON:
come from the salt depths of the Aegean Sea,
Vhere the white feet of Nereids tread their circling dance:
am Poseidon. Troy and its people were my city.
hat ring of walls and towers I and Apollo built –
quared every stone in it; and my affection has not faded.
ow Troy lies dead under the conquering Argive spear,
ripped, sacked and smouldering.

Epeius, a Phocian from Parnassus, made
o Athene's plan that horse pregnant with armed men,
alled by all future ages the Wooden Horse, and sent it
o glide, weighty with hidden death, through the Trojan walls.
he sacred groves are deserted; the temples run with blood;

On Zeus the Protector's altar-steps Priam lies dead.
Measureless gold and all the loot of Troy goes down
To the Greek ships; and now they wait for a following v
To make glad, after ten long years, with the sight of t
wives and children
The men who sailed from Greece to attack and destroy
town.

Athene, and Hera of Argos, the gods who joined in le
To achieve this end, have worsted me: now I must leav
Ilion the famous, leave my altars. When desolation
Falls like a blight, the day for the worship of god
past.

Scamandros echoes with endless cries of captured wo
Assigned by lottery as slaves to various Greeks – Arcadi
Thessalians, or Athenians. Those not yet allotted
Are in this house, reserved for the chiefs of the Greek ar
With them, justly held as a prisoner, is Tyndareus' daugh
Spartan Helen. But if you would see misery itself,
Here by the door, prostrate, shedding unmeasured tears
For griefs unmeasured, Hecabe lies. She does not know
That her daughter Polyxena died just now most pitiably
An offering slaughtered at Achilles' grave. Her husb
Priam,
Is dead; so are her sons. Her daughter the prophetess,
Cassandra, whom Apollo himself left virgin, – she
Will be taken by force, in contempt of the god and all p
feeling
By King Agamemnon as his concubine.
Farewell, then, city!
Superb masonry, farewell! You have had your day of glo
You would stand firm yet, were it not for Athene, daug
of Zeus.

Enter ATHENE.

IENE:
ou are a great god honoured by gods – and my father's brother:
ay our old feud be buried? I have something to say to you.
EIDON:
/elcome, Athene. Family love has a magic power.
IENE:
ou are generous, and I thank you. The matter I wish to discuss
qually concerns us both.
EIDON: I suppose you bring some word
om Zeus, or from some other god, greater or less.
IENE:
o. I come to entreat your powerful aid and alliance
n behalf of Troy – yes, of this place!
EIDON: Have you renounced
our hatred? Now she is blackened with fire, do you pity Troy?
IENE:
irst answer: will you join me, support what I want to do?
EIDON:
will. Tell me your mind: is it Greece or Troy you are helping?
IENE:
am disposed to favour the Trojans, whom I hated;
nd to make this homeward voyage disastrous for the Greeks.
EIDON:
ut why? Surely your change of affection is somewhat casual?
/hy this leaping at random between hate and love?
IENE:
ou know of the insult offered my temple – offered to me?
EIDON:
/hen Aias dragged Cassandra from sanctuary? I know.

ATHENE:

No punishment from the Greeks, not even a reprimand

POSEIDON:

After the decisive help you gave them in winning the w

ATHENE:

Therefore I look to you to help me make them suffer.

POSEIDON:

My powers await your wishes, Athene. What is your pl

ATHENE:

I mean to make their homeward journey – unfortunate.

POSEIDON:

Before they embark, or on the open sea?

ATHENE: At se

When they are under sail from Troy, nearing their hom
Zeus will himself send rain in floods with incessant hail
And black tornadoes – give me his lightning-fire to bla
And burn the Achaean ships. Then do your part: infuria
The Aegean with waves and whirlpools; let floating co
jostle
Thick down the Euboean Gulf; so that Greeks may lea
future
To respect my altars and show humility before the gods

POSEIDON:

Athene, the help you need shall be given without n
words.
I will uproar the whole Aegean; the shores of Myconos
The Delian reefs, Scyros, Lemnos, the Capherian capes,
Shall gather the drowned by thousands. Now go bac
Olympus;
Receive the lightning-shafts from your father's hand;
watch
For the Argive ships of war to spread their sails for hon
When a man who takes a city includes in the ge
destruction
Temples of the high gods and tombs that honour the d

He is a fool: his own destruction follows him close.

ATHENE *and* POSEIDON *depart in different directions. The recumbent figure of* HECABE *stirs: she rises on one arm.*

HECABE:

Lift your neck from the dust; [*Strophe* 1
Up with your head!
This is not Troy; the kings of Troy are dead:
Bear what you must.
The tide has turned at length:
Ebb with the tide, drift helpless down.
Useless to struggle on,
Breasting the storm when Fate prevails.
I mourn for my dead world, my burning town,
My sons, my husband, gone, all gone!
What pride of race, what strength
Once swelled our royal sails!
Now shrunk to nothing, sunk in mean oblivion!

How must I deal with grief? [*Antistrophe* 1
Hold, or give rein?
See where my outcast limbs have lain!
Stones for a bed bring sorrow small relief.
My heart would burst,
My sick head beats and burns,
Till passion pleads to ease its pain
In restless rocking, like a boat
That sways and turns,
Keeping sad time to my funereal song.
For those whom Fate has cursed
Music itself sings but one note –
Unending miseries, torment and wrong!

When the swift-winged Hellene ships [*Strophe* 2
Sailing from their land-locked ports
Through the salt sea's purple glow
Swooped on sacred Ilion,

Shrill, triumphant from a thousand flutes and pipes
Rose their martial music.
In the gulf of Troas
(Ah, poor Troas!)
They made fast their hawsers of Egyptian twine,
Sworn to bring back hated Helen,
The cursed wife of Menelaus,
Sparta's shame and Castor's ruin, her whose sin
Struck down Priam, patriarch of fifty sons,
Wrecked my life, and left me
Stranded and despairing.

Here near Agamemnon's tent, [*Antistroph*
Prisoner and slave, I sit,
An unpitied exile,
Old, my grey hair ravaged
With the knife of mourning.
Come, you widowed brides of Trojan fighting-men,
Weeping mothers, trembling daughters,
Come, weep with me while the smoke goes up fr
Troy!
Once with cheerful Phrygian music,
Solemn hymns and sacred dances,
I, Queen Hecabe, Priam's sceptre in my hand,
Led your steps and voices:
Now the song is saddened
To the seagull's crying round her helpless young.

The first half of the CHORUS *has begun to enter: they group themselves round* HECABE.

CHORUS 1:

We heard your voice, Hecabe; why did you call? [*Strophe*
What did you say? As we sat there indoors
Thinking of slavery with bitter tears,
Your cry of agony came to us, and we all
Shuddered with nameless fears.

ECABE:
The Argive crews muster and grip their oars.
HORUS:
Will they take us now? What have you heard?
Is this our last breath of our native air?
ECABE:
Who knows? I guess the worst.
HORUS:
Soon we shall hear the final, dreaded word:
'Out of the house, you Trojan slaves! On board!
The Argive fleet sets sail for home!'
ECABE:
Cassandra – no! That must not be!
Keep my frenzied child Cassandra there!
Hold her – she must not come!
It would crown my grief to see
Her go dishonoured to her captor's bed.
Troy, Troy! This is your ultimate agony –
Robbed of your living remnant, deserted by your dead!

The second half of the CHORUS *now enter.*

HORUS 2: I came to ask for news; [*Antistrophe* 3
Speak to me, Hecabe! Terrors come crowding thick –
Have they resolved to kill us? Are the crews
Taking their places at the oars?
Is there no word yet of our fate?
ECABE: My child, I do not know.
I came out here because, maddened and sick
With horror, I could not sleep.
HORUS: Oh! To what pitiless master shall I go?
ECABE: You have not long to wait.
HORUS: But long to weep.
A slave? Where will my new home be?
Some island? Famous Argos, or Thessaly?
Far, far from Troy!

HECABE: A queen – to fall so low!
On what strange, distant shore
Shall I, to whom my country gave
Honour, authority, imperial sway,
Be set by some Greek lord
To tend his children, or to keep
Watch at his door –
An aged, useless ghost, unknown, ignored,
A shadow of death – a slave!

CHORUS:

What words of yours can release [*Strophe*
Pity to match your pain?
And I – never again
Shall I sway to the shuttle's song,
Weaving wool spun from a home-bred fleece!
Instead, one last, last look at the faces of my dead sons,
Then go to meet yet worse –
Forced, maybe, to the bed of some lustful Greek –
Listen, gods, to my curse
On the night that hides such wrong!
By day, servile and meek,
Carrying water from the well –
Perhaps, holy Peirene! – This is my first prayer,
To go to famous Athens, where
The streets are golden, so they tell;
But not to Sparta, where the wild Eurotas runs,
Not to hated Helen's cruel employ –
Menial to Menelaus, murderer of Troy!

I have heard it told [*Antistrophe*
That, above broad Peneius, enchanting fields,
The green plinth of Olympus, hold
Rich fruits and heavy harvest; there,
After King Theseus' sacred earth,

My second choice would lie.
They say, the land of Aetna, where
Hephaestus' forge clangs underground,
And Eastward, fronting the Phoenician Sound,
The Mother of Sicily's mountains towers high, –
Far-reaching fame has crowned
This land for people of heroic worth.
There is a valley, yet again,
Lying nearest to the Ionian Sea,
Where the most lovely of all rivers runs,
Crathis, whose waters, fed by fertile dews,
The gift of Heaven, supply
Wealth and good living to its hardy sons:
There is a home that I would choose!

Look! The herald from the Achaean camp,
Hurrying here with urgent orders!
What has been decided? What will be his message?
Now our slavery begins:
We are chattels of the Dorian State!

Enter TALTHYBIUS. HECABE, *who did not turn when the* CHORUS *announced his approach, still stands without looking at him.*

TALTHYBIUS: Hecabe, I think you know by now who I am – Talthybius; you have seen me come here often enough from the Greek camp – on official business. Now I have news for you.

HECABE: Courage, my dears;
The moment we have dreaded has now come.

TALTHYBIUS: The lots have been drawn for you – if this was what you dreaded.

HECABE: Come, tell us then: are we to go to Thebes,
Or to some city in Thessaly?

TALTHYBIUS: Each of you is assigned to a separate master – not all to one.

HECABE: Tell us our luck – is any of us lucky?

TALTHYBIUS: I can tell you; but ask your questions singly, not all at once.

HECABE: Then tell me quickly, who is to have Cassandra?
My poor Cassandra!

TALTHYBIUS: She was not drawn for. Agamemnon chose her specially.

HECABE: He chose her – how? As a slave to attend his wife?

TALTHYBIUS: No: for his own bed. She is to be his concubine.

HECABE: But she belongs to the bright-haired Apollo –
A consecrated virgin, set aside
By him to live in single purity!

TALTHYBIUS: She may be consecrated; but Agamemnon is infatuated.

HECABE: Cassandra, fling your temple-keys away!
Strip off your vestments, tear your holy wreath!

TALTHYBIUS: Why? It's a great thing for her, surely, to be bride to a king?

HECABE: What of my other daughter, whom you took
From me last night?

TALTHYBIUS: You mean Polyxena?

HECABE: Has she been drawn for? Who possesses her?

TALTHYBIUS: She was assigned to the tomb of Achilles – as an attendant.

HECABE: Attendant at a tomb! My child! – Talthybius,
Is this some law, some custom, of the Greeks?

TALTHYBIUS: All is well with your daughter; you should be glad for her.

HECABE: What do you mean? At least she is alive?

TALTHYBIUS: Her fate is settled; and she is free from suffering.

HECABE: What is decided for my daughter-in-law,
Iron-hearted Hector's wife, Andromache?

TALTHYBIUS: She goes, as an award of distinction, to the son of Achilles.

HECABE: And I, whose shaking hand leans on a stick,
Whose slave am I, grey-headed Hecabe?

TALTHYBIUS: You were given to the king of Ithaca, Odysseus.

HECABE:
Odysseus? Oh! Odysseus! Now
Shear the head, tear the cheek,
Beat the brow!
Cruellest fate of all! Now I belong
To a perjured impious outcast, who defies
Man's law and God's; monster of wickedness
Whose tongue twists straight to crooked, truth to lies,
Friendship to hate, mocks right and honours wrong!
Now my fated life, dear friends,
Sinks and ends.
Weep for me, and veil my head;
Hope is dead; to-day I know
The last throe of misery!

CHORUS: My lady, you know the worst now; but what of us?
What Greek master is going to possess us?

TALTHYBIUS: Men, bring Cassandra out here at once. I must first hand her over to the General, then distribute the other women according to the draw. – Why, what's that? Lighted torches? Are those women setting the place on fire, or what? Would they rather burn to death than be taken away to Argos? Well! People gently brought up take a calamity like this surprisingly hard. – Open the door! – It's greatly to their credit; but the generals will be annoyed, and they'll blame me.

HECABE: No, no, they are not setting anything on fire. It is my daughter Cassandra; the prophetic inspiration is on her. Here she comes!

CASSANDRA *comes in with a flaming torch in each hand. One she places in a sconce on the pediment of a broken statue, and to this she turns when she addresses* HYMEN; *the other she holds in one hand as she moves about the stage.*

CASSANDRA:

Raise the torch and fling the flame!
Flood the walls with holy light!
Worship the Almighty
Hymen, God of Marriage!
Agamemnon, master of my maiden flesh,
King of Argos, take me!
Heaven's blessing falls on me and falls on you.
Hear our cry of worship,
Hymen, God of Marriage!

Mother, since *you* crouch and cry
Weak with tears and loud with grief
For my dear dead city
And my murdered father,
I have brought them – torches for my wedding-night,
Leaping light and dancing flame,
In your honour, Hymen, God of hot desire!
Queen of Darkness, send the gleam you love to lend
To the ritual blessing
Of the wedded virgin!

Dancers, come!
Loose your leaping feet,
Wild with wine of ecstasy!
Glorify my father's happy fate!
God Apollo, lead this holy ritual dance!
In your temple-court,
Under your immortal laurel-tree,
I your priestess call on you!
Hymen, mighty god,
Hymen, hear!

Come and dance,
Mother, dance with me;

Charm the Powers with lucky words,
Loudly chant your daughter's wedding-song!
Wildly whirl and turn in purest ecstasy!
Maids of Troy,
Wear your brightest gowns;
Come, and sing my wedding-song,
Hail the lover Love and Fate appoint for me!

HORUS: Queen, she is out of her mind. You must control her, or she'll go dancing down to the Greek camp!

ECABE: God of Fire! You bear the torch at weddings; but this torch-waving is a horrible mockery of all that I hoped for! Oh, my child, my child! I used to look forward to the time when you would be of age to be given to a man: how little I thought it would be like this – a slave taken in war by the Greeks!

Give me that torch! It is sacrilege for you to carry it, when you hardly know what you are doing. All you have suffered has not made you sane – you are just as you were. Women, take these torches in; and answer her wedding-song with your tears.

ASSANDRA: Put a garland of victory on my head, Mother, and rejoice at my royal marriage! Take me to Agamemnon; f you find me reluctant, force me; for if Apollo is a god, his famous king of Greeks will find me a more fatal bride han Helen was. I shall be his death, and the ruin of his whole house; so I shall avenge my brothers and my father.

Enough of that; I will not prophesy of the axe that shall all on my neck – and not only on mine; or of the agony that shall follow from my marriage, when son murders mother; or of the overthrow of the dynasty of Atreus. Yes, there is a god possesses me – but this at least is no mad raving: I will how you that this Troy of ours is more enviable than Greece! Greece for the sake of one woman and her lust – vent hunting Helen and led ten thousand men to death!

Their sage commander, to win what he most hated, l
what he most loved; sacrificed the delights of home a
children to his brother Menelaus, for a woman who was
kidnapped by force, but unfaithful of her own free will!

When the Greeks came to our shores, what did they
for day after day? To repel invasion from their borders
siege from their city-walls? No! When a man was killed,
limbs were not laid to rest by his wife's hands, he had f
gotten what his children looked like; and now his bones
in alien earth. In their homes things were no better: th
women died in widowhood; fathers sank into childless
age longing for the sons they had brought up, and w
buried with none to honour their graves. Certainly Gre
has much to thank her army for! There were worse thi
still – things better forgotten, deeds unfit for a consecra
tongue to tell.

How different it was for our men! It was their glory
die defending their own country; those who fell w
carried by comrades to their homes, prepared for burial
the hands they loved, and laid to rest in the ground t
gave them birth. Those who survived in battle returned ea
evening to their wives and children, – the Greeks had
such consolation. Even in Hector's death, Mother, there
something beside sorrow. He did not die till he had ma
himself a heroic name; and that was due to the coming of t
Greeks – if they had stayed at home we would never ha
known how great Hector was! Paris, too, might have ma
some quite undistinguished marriage; instead, his bride v
the daughter of Zeus.

Certainly a man will avoid war if he is wise; but if v
comes, he wins glory for his country by a noble death, a
shame by cowardice. So, Mother, you ought not to we
for Troy, or for what will happen to me. By this marriage
mine I shall destroy my worst enemy and yours.

CHORUS: You pass off with a pleasant laugh things that shou

wring your inmost soul; – not that you will have much to show for all your prophesying!

TALTHYBIUS: If it were not that Apollo had driven you crazy, my general would have you punished for this – inviting ill-luck at the very moment he sets sail! You count for nothing; but Agamemnon, a great man with a name for wisdom – why, he's no saner than you are! This son of Atreus, supreme commander of all the armies of Hellas, out of all the prisoners chose this mad girl to fall in love with! I'm a poor man, but I wouldn't have had her as a gift! Since you are not in your right mind, your insults to us and compliments to Troy may go to the winds! Now come, it is time you were on board – the Commander-in-Chief's lovely bride! You, Hecabe, follow as soon as Odysseus is ready for you. You will be servant to his wife Penelope, a woman all the Greeks here speak well of.

CASSANDRA: 'Servant'? – this ignorant servant! He is a herald: fine name, 'herald' – for creatures universally loathed, lackeys and menials of courts and governments! So *you* say my mother shall see Odysseus' palace: then what of Apollo's oracles, which have told me clearly that she shall die here? – and more, and worse, which I will not tell.

But I am sorry for Odysseus. The day will come when my fate and Troy's will seem bliss to him; but of sufferings in store he knows nothing now. Not until he has added another ten years to his years at Troy, shall he reach his home, alone. (He shall pass the rocky gorge where fearful Charybdis lives; the mountains haunted by the cannibal Cyclops; he shall meet Circe, who turns men to swine; be shipwrecked; be tested by the seductive lotus, by the holy oxen of the Sun, whose flesh shall speak with human voice – a voice to make Odysseus tremble; finally, after descending alive to Hades and safely crossing the River of Dread, he shall reach Ithaca only to find his home torn by a thousand troubles.)

Yet – enough of Odysseus: those arrows are not yet shot.
Lead on! my bridegroom is waiting for me at the porch
death!
You have lived with a curse – with a curse they shall bu
you, secretly,
In the night – pale shadow of Majesty, prime commander
Greece!
Near your dishonoured grave they will fling my naked bod
Out where wintry floods course down the mountain chasm
And beasts will pick the bones of Apollo's virgin priestess.
Go, garland of Phoebus, symbol of dear devotion,
Go with the vanished joys of his temple-celebrations,
Go, his gifts – I tear you from my still untainted body
For the swift winds to carry back to the Lord of Prophecy
Where is the ship? Which way? Lose not a moment, watc
For the wind stirring the sails! You are sending me t
Hellas
As one of three Avengers. Mother, no tears! Farewell!
Oh, my brothers, buried in this dear earth of Troy,
My father, you have not long to wait for me. I will come
To the House of Death triumphant, my hands and garment
red
With the blood of the House of Atreus, who brought ou
Troy to dust!

TALTHYBIUS *goes out with* CASSANDRA. HECABE *collapses to the ground.*

CHORUS: Women, look, oh, look! Hecabe your mistress fall
to the ground without a word. Come, help her! She is ol
and weak: how can you leave her lying there? Lift her up

HECABE: Let me lie here. Your comforting is no comfort
Here in the dust pain such as mine belongs – yesterday's an
to-day's and to-morrow's pain. O gods! ... Gods ar
treacherous helpers; yet, when our world has collapsed, i
seems suitable to call upon the gods.

First I will tell over the glories of yesterday, to deepe

the tragedy of to-day. I was born royal. My husband was a king. The sons I gave him were princes – not of the rank and file but foremost of the Phrygians. No mother in Troy, in Greece or in Asia, could ever boast such sons! I saw them all killed by Greek swords; I cut locks of my hair to lay on their graves. Their father Priam was murdered – this was not told me by some messenger, where I might weep seemly tears in private – I saw Priam with my own eyes stabbed to death at the central altar of his home. I saw Troy captured; my daughters, whom I had reared as precious gifts for husbands worthy of them, were torn from my arms and given to our enemies. There is no hope that they will ever see me again, or I them.

Now comes the last crowning agony, in my old age to go to Hellas as a slave! They will set me tasks to dishonour my grey head – answering the door, keeping the keys, making bread: me, the mother of Hector! No queen's bed for me now: I shall lay my shrivelled body to rest on the floor, and wear faded, worn rags to match my skin and mock my royalty.

O my grief! How I have suffered, and must yet suffer, for the sake of one woman and her love! Cassandra, my child, what outrage ends your holy virginity, that shared the mysteries of gods! Polyxena, child of sorrow, where are you? Of all my children not one son or daughter is here to help me!

Why lift me up? What have I to hope for? Come, I have finished with the softness of Troy: lead me to my hard slave's pallet, my pillow of stone, to die under the lash of tears. Fortune is a false friend; call no man happy until he dies.

HORUS:

Come, Muse, in tears begin,
And sing strange dirges over Ilion's grave.
Now loud and clear the story shall be told

Of that wheeled horse that brought the Argives in,
Made Troy a ruin, me a slave.

On towering legs, bridled with gold,
Stuffed with swords that rang to the sky,
They left it near our city's gate.
Up to the Trojan Rock we rushed, and stood
Shouting, 'The war is over! Come,
Bring in the wooden horse for an offering
To the Daughter of Zeus, Pallas, Lady of Troy!'
Then what girl would stay behind?
When even the old men left their chairs,
And with laughing and singing all laid hold
Of that hidden death that had marked them down.

The nation of Troy streamed from the town,
And Priam himself went with them,
To honour the Virgin Pallas,
Driver of Heaven's immortal horses, and offer to her
This gleaming monster of mountain pine
That hid the waiting swords of Greece.
Hauling on cables of flaxen twine
Like a ship's dark hulk they drew it along
And up the hill to the Temple rising white;
And there, on the holy floor where the slaughter of Tro
began,
Gave their gift to the god they knew.

Over their happy weariness fell the shadow of night.
Then Libyan flutes rang out,
And the old tunes were played,
And our hearts were joined in singing
And in music of dancing feet;
Until through the darkened palace
One flare still left alight
Flickered on sleeping faces its dim gleam of fire.

was at home that night,
oining in songs and dances
o honour the Maiden Goddess,
rtemis of the Mountains;
Vhen – over the streets of the central city
shriek of death rose like a grip at the throat;
nd trembling children clutched at their mothers' skirts;
nd Pallas played her part,
nd War went forth from his secret lair.

Men sank in blood while their dead hands clasped the altar;
he head half-raised from the pillow
Defenceless rolled from the severed neck;
nd beside the dead the victor's lust
lanted the seed of a son for Hellas,
Watered with tears of Troy's despair.

ANDROMACHE *approaches, drawn in a chariot by Greek soldiers. She holds* ASTYANAX *on her lap.*

ORUS:
Hecabe, see! Andromache is coming,
Drawn in a Greek chariot, beating her breast;
nd Hector's son Astyanax is with her.
Where are they taking you, sad Andromache,
nd beside you Hector's sword and armour of bronze,
nd other spoils of Troy, which Achilles' son
hall dedicate in distant temples of Thessaly?

DROMACHE: The Achaeans are carrying home their roperty.

CABE: O Zeus, have pity!

DROMACHE: That prayer is mine by right –

CABE: O Zeus!

DROMACHE: – bought with my husband's blood, my tears.

CABE: Children! –

DROMACHE: No more your children: all that is ended.

CABE: Once we were happy, and Troy – all that is ended.

ANDROMACHE: Ended.
HECABE: My noble children!
ANDROMACHE: They are gone.
HECABE: Gone; and my home, my lovely city –
ANDROMACHE: Gone!
HECABE: Now smoke and ashes!
ANDROMACHE: Hector, my own husband –
HECABE: Hector is with the dead. Hector, my son!
My daughter!
ANDROMACHE: Hector, when will you come to help me
HECABE: Priam, aged king of my princely sons,
Priam, fallen a sport for your enemies,
Soothe my head on the pillow of death!
ANDROMACHE: All the love we have lost!
HECABE: The grief we have gained!
ANDROMACHE: All that we knew, destroyed!
HECABE: All anguish doubled!
ANDROMACHE:
The gods have hated us, since the day when Paris
Was spared at his birth, to live and destroy his country
For the sake of accursed Helen. Now vultures wheel,
Waiting to tear the dead stretched at the feet
Of Pallas, while we – are slaves and must look on.
HECABE:
O city, dead, deserted, I weep for you.
Home where my babes were born, this is your end:
Who would not weep? City lost, children lost,
All lost! Was there ever heard such chorus of pain?
When were such tears shed for a murdered house?
Can even the dead see this, and forget to weep?
CHORUS: In times of misery it is a comfort to shed tears,
mourn and lament, and find words that will voice our gr
ANDROMACHE: Hector killed more Greeks in battle t
any other man – Hector, your son; and this is his armo
do you see where it is going?

CABE: I see where the world goes, when the gods will: the ıean are exalted, and the high brought low.

DROMACHE: Everything is turned upside down: royalty nslaved, I and my son carried off as spoils of war.

CABE: No terms can be made with Fate. I have just now :en Cassandra dragged away by force.

DROMACHE: What? Then a second Aias has proved as bold s the first! Poor child! But I have more to tell you.

CABE: There is always more. My sorrows are without end; ıd each is sharper than the last.

DROMACHE: Your daughter Polyxena is dead. They killed er at the tomb of Achilles, as a gift to his dead body.

CABE: O horror! Oh! That was what Talthybius meant just ow by his evasive answers. It was plain enough.

DROMACHE: I saw her myself. I left the chariot, and overed her with a robe, and shed the tears that were due r her.

CABE: O my child, my child! What blasphemous murder! low terrible to die like this – O my daughter!

DROMACHE: It was terrible; but she is dead now; and eing dead she is happier than I who am left alive.

CABE: No, no. To be dead is worse. In life there is hope; ut in death, nothing.

DROMACHE: Listen, Hecabe – you are my mother, as you e hers: let me comfort your heart with welcome truth. I elieve that to be dead is the same as never to have been born, ıd far better than living in misery. The dead have no feel- ıg; so evil can bring no pain. But one who has known rosperity, and falls from happiness to unhappiness, wanders ewildered in an unknown world. It is for Polyxena as ıough she had never been born; in death she remembers othing of all that she suffered. For me it is different. I med at high repute, and was successful; now I have lost all ıat I aimed at. As Hector's wife I studied and practised the erfection of womanly modesty. I gave up all desire of visit-

ing my neighbours and stayed in my own house – whe
woman must stay, however blameless her reputation, un
she means to invite slander; and I refused to admit into
house the amusing gossip of other women. Having by nat
a sound mind to school me, I was content; before my l
band I kept a quiet tongue and a modest eye; I knew in w
matters I should rule, and where I should yield to
authority.

It seems that report of me reached the Greek camp,
was the cause of my present fate; for when I was captu
Achilles' son asked for me as his wife. What could that
but slavery, in the house of the man who killed my husba
What am I to do? Must I forget my beloved Hector and o
my heart to my new husband, and be known as a betraye
the dead? But if I am faithful to Hector's love I shall earn
master's hate. And they say one night is enough to disp
woman's dislike of any husband! How I despise the wor
who in a new marriage forgets her first husband and lo
the second! Why, even a horse will refuse to pull in harn
when separated from its stable-companion; yet a beast is
inferior creature with neither speech nor mind!

Dearest Hector! You had all that I could ask for in a h
band: wisdom, birth, wealth, and manliness, all in abu
ance. You took me untouched from my father's house,
my virginity was given to you. Now you are dead; an
must sail, a prisoner and a slave, to Hellas. – Hecabe,
weep for Polyxena; but do you not feel that her death
lesser evil than what I have to bear? I have not even
common human blessing of hope; I cannot delude my
with the pleasant dream of any imaginary happiness in
future.

CHORUS: Your suffering is the same as ours; your bi
words teach us the depth of our own sorrow.

HECABE: At sea, when sailors fall in with rough weather, t
work with a will to come safely through. One man stands

the helm, another trims the sail, a third bales the hold; – I have seen pictures and heard men speak of it, though I was never in a ship myself. But when the ocean rages and boils in an overwhelming storm, then they give in to their fate and commit themselves to the careering waves. In the same way I am defeated by the storm of misery the gods have sent me: my troubles multiply, and leave me speechless with despair.

But, my dear daughter, cease mourning for Hector; all your tears cannot help him. And honour your new master; win his love as a husband by your own goodness and sweetness. In this way you will not only make your own life happier, but you may even bring up my little grandson, to be – who can tell? – the saviour of Troy! Sons of yours may yet one day found a new Ilion, and our city live again.

But look – I see the Greek herald coming back: news follows news. What further can he have to tell us about their decisions?

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

ALTHYBIUS: Andromache, widow of the bravest of the Trojans: do not hate me. It is with great reluctance that I have to convey to you the decision unanimously reached by the Greeks and their two generals, the sons of Pelops.

NDROMACHE: What is this? Your words hint at the worst.

ALTHYBIUS: It was decided that your son – how can I say it?

NDROMACHE: He is to have a different master from mine?

ALTHYBIUS: No Greek will ever be his master.

NDROMACHE: What? Is he to be the one Trojan left behind in Troy?

ALTHYBIUS: My news is bad. It is hard to find words.

NDROMACHE: Thank you for your sympathy. What have you to say?

ALTHYBIUS: You must know the worst: they mean to kill your son.

ANDROMACHE: Oh, gods! His sentence is worse than min

TALTHYBIUS: In a speech delivered before the whole a sembly Odysseus carried his point –

ANDROMACHE [*sobbing passionately*]: Oh, oh! This is mo than I can bear.

TALTHYBIUS: – that the son of so distinguished a father mu not be allowed to attain manhood –

ANDROMACHE: May he hear the same sentence passed o his own son!

TALTHYBIUS: – but should be thrown down from the battl ments of Troy. Now show yourself a sensible woman, ar accept this decision. Don't cling to him, or imagine you ha any chance of resisting: you have none. Bear what must l like a queen. There is no one who can help you. You can se for yourself: your city and your husband are gone; you a in our hands. Shall we match our strength against or woman? We can. So I hope that you won't feel inclined t struggle, or to call down curses on the Greeks, or do an thing that might lead to violent measures or resentment. you say anything to anger the army, this child will die witl out rites of pity, without burial. If you are quiet, and acce the inevitable in a proper spirit, you will be allowed to l your child in his grave, and you will find the Greeks mo considerate to yourself.

ANDROMACHE: Darling child, precious beyond all price You will die, killed by our enemies, leaving your mother t mourn. Your noble father's courage, which saved other has condemned you; his spirit was a fatal inheritance. thought, on that day when I entered Hector's house as bride, on that ill-fated night, that my son would rule th teeming multitudes of the East – not die by a Greek ritu of murder.

Are you crying, little one? Do you understand? Why d you tug my hand, cling to my dress, nestling like a bir under its mother's wing? No Hector will rise from th

grave and step forth to save you, gripping his glorious spear; none of your father's brothers, no army of Phrygians. You must leap from that horrible height, and fall, and break your neck, and give up your life, and be pitied by no one.

My baby, so young in my arms, and so dear! O the sweet smell of your skin! When you were newly born, how I wrapped you up and gave you my breast, and tended you day and night, and was worn out with weariness – all for nothing, for nothing! Now say good-bye to me for the last time; come close to your mother, wind your arms round my neck, and put your lips to mine.

O men of Hellas, inventors of cruelty unworthy of you! Why will you kill him? What has he done? – Helen, child of Tyndareus, you are no daughter of divine Majesty! You had many fathers, and I can name them: the Avenging Curse was one, Hate was the next, then Murder and Death and every evil that lives on earth! I will swear that Zeus never fathered you to ruin men's lives by tens of thousands through Asia and Hellas! My curse on you! With the shining glance of your beauty you have brought this rich and noble country to a shameful end.

Take him! Carry him away, throw him down, if your edict says 'Throw!' Feast on his flesh! God is destroying us! I have no power to save my child from death. Hide my miserable body, throw me on board! I go to my princely marriage, and leave behind me my dead child.

CHORUS: Miserable Troy! You mourn ten thousand dead for the sake of one woman and her accursed love!

TALTHYBIUS:

Come, child; I pity your mother, but time is up.
No more embracing now.
You must climb to the topmost fringe of your father's towers,
Where the sentence says you must leave your life behind.
Take him. – A job like this

Is fit for a man without feeling or decency;
I'm not half brutal enough.

TALTHYBIUS *and his men go out with* ASTYANAX, *followed by* ANDROMACHE.

HECABE:

O little child, son of my dear lost son,
Your life is ravished from us by murderers.
What will become of us? What can I do for you?
Only to beat the head and bruise the breast –
This we can give; no more.
Lost city, lost child: what climax of suffering
Lacks now? Have we not reached
In a headlong plunge the abyss of pain?

CHORUS:

This is not new to Troy, that out of Hellas [*Strophe*
should come
Death, devastation and cold-eyed hate.
Far off in the island of Salamis, whose bee-haunted slopes
Look out over the circling surf to that holy rock
Where Athene first displayed the dark-green shoot of olive
To anoint and bless with a heavenly crown the city Athens, –
In Salamis lived King Telamon,
Who once, as a friend and ally of the mighty archer Heracl
Came with an army to Ilion,
Came long ago to plunder and burn our city of Ilion.

That was the former time, when Heracles, [*Antistrophe*
enraged
For loss of the just reward our king refused him, landed
The flower of Grecian youth on the lovely banks of Simo
Eased his oars from the sea, and fastened his stern-cables.
Then from the ship he brought his bow,
Shaped for the skill of his hand, bent for Laomedon's bloo

ıd he split with fire's red blast the stones that Apollo squared,
And laid in the dust our city's life.
twice the reeking sword has pierced the heart of Troy,
Twice her towers have crashed in thunder.

hy, then, Ganymede, son of Laomedon, [*Strophe* 2
ou who walk delicately among golden wine-cups
uring out wine for Zeus, your exalted office
ought little help to your boyhood's home!
ok! The land of your birth is a blazing heap!
sten! What cry comes from the shore?
agulls robbed of their young?
! Wives for their husbands, mothers for sons
ughters for aged mothers weep and howl!

The sandy course you ran and wrestled on,
The dewy fountains where you bathed, are gone.
Still near the heavenly throne the same fresh grace
Lights the untroubled beauty of your face;
But Troy, where you began,
Greeks have stamped out to the last man.

ve once came to the house of Laomedon, [*Antistrophe* 2
guiling gods to favour the royal family,
nking Troy with Olympus in marriage-bonds,
alting Troy to the height of Heaven.
ıd Zeus, for Ganymede's sake – No! no reproach!
ıt how could Dawn, of the gleaming wing,
ıwn, that the whole world loves,
ow could *she* smile down on us dying, dying,
se on our devastated streets, and smile?

For this land gave her what she held most dear,
Our royal prince, Tithonus, who begot
Her sons, whom in her golden chariot

She bore off heavenward through the starry sphere.
He was Troy's hope; but he
And all Troy's hopes from Heaven were vanity.

Enter MENELAUS, *attended.*

MENELAUS: The day I have waited for has come! glorious the sunlight is! To-day I shall lay hands on H my wife. Yes, I am the man who has endured this ten y labour, Menelaus; – and the Greek army too. Well, I to Troy not so much for her sake as people think; but ra to meet the man who entered my house as a guest, dece me, and like a thief went off with my wife. Now with help of the gods, and the Greek army, we have made P and his whole country, pay for it in blood.

And I have come to fetch the Spartan woman – I w rather not pronounce her name – who was my wife. have included her in the list of female prisoners, and her here in their quarters. The men whose swords have tured her gave her to me to kill, or if I chose not to kill to take back to Argos; and I have decided not to carry sentence here in Troy as I first intended, but to take back by ship to Greece, and there hand her over to t who have lost their dear ones in this war, that she may n amends to them by her death.

[*To the soldiers.*] What are you waiting for? Get in fetch her out! Drag the murderess by the hair! [*The sol go.*] Once the wind sets fair, we'll have her home.

HECABE: Zeus, whoever thou art, upholding the ea throned above the earth, whether human intelligence natural law, mysterious and unknown, I praise thee: thou movest on a noiseless path and guidest all hu affairs to their just end!

MENELAUS: That's a strange prayer. What does it mean

HECABE: If you are going to kill your wife, Menelau applaud you. But when you see her, take care, or you be trapped by her beauty. She has enchantments that

ptivate men's eyes, bring cities to ruin and homes to
ies. I know her; so do you,, so does everyone who has
fered by her.

HELEN *enters, the soldiers following her.*

EN: Menelaus! Perhaps you intended to begin by frighten-
me. Your men seized me and brought me out here by
ce. I think I know that you hate me; yet I would like to
, what sentence have you and the Greeks passed on me?
n I to live or die?

ELAUS: There was no question about that. Every man
ted to hand you over to me, whom you wronged, to kill.

EN: May I reply to that decision, and show that to kill me
uld be unjust?

ELAUS: I came here to use my sword, not to argue.

ABE: Let her speak, Menelaus; she must not die without
earing. And let *me* undertake to speak in her accusation.
u know nothing of the mischief she has made in Troy.
e whole indictment will ensure her death: she will not
ape.

ELAUS: It is a favour, and will take time; however, if
wants to defend herself, she may. Let her observe that
rant it for your sake, Hecabe, not from any indulgence
wards her.

EN: Perhaps, since you regard me as your enemy, you
end to make no answer, whether you think my defence
ong or weak. But I will guess what charges you would
ke if you accused me, and as I too have things to accuse
u of, I will reply by weighing the one against the other.
Whom shall we blame first? Hecabe, who brought into
world the origin of all our troubles, Paris; and secondly
am, who brought disaster on Troy and on me by refusing
kill the infant, though his fatal destiny was foreseen in
image of a firebrand. What followed then? Listen while
ll you.
Paris was made judge between the three goddesses.

Athene promised him that he should lead the Phrygia
war and destroy Hellas. Hera promised that if he pronou
for her he should be king over Asia and Europe. But A
dite stirred his vision by telling him of my beauty, v
should be his reward, if he judged her the loveliest. A
dite won her prize; Paris won me; and the result for H
was this benefit at least, that to-day you are neither def
by Asian armies nor ruled by an Asian king. But I had t
for the good fortune of Hellas: sold for my beauty, al
by those who should have crowned me in honour.

You will say I have not yet answered the main questi
how I came to fly secretly from your house. It was no n
deity whose power came as ally to Paris, Hecabe's
genius. And you, like a fool or worse, must needs leave
in your house and sail away from Sparta to Crete!

My next question I put to myself rather than to you.
happened in my heart, to make me desert my country
my home and go away with this man whom I hardly k
The power of love is something neither I nor you can r
Zeus rules all other gods, but is Aphrodite's slave.
should show Aphrodite your anger, me your forgivenes

There is one other charge you may feel justified in b
ing against me. When Paris was dead and in his grave
Aphrodite was no longer concerned about my fortunes,
you will say, I ought to have quitted Troy and come t
Greek camp. That was what I tried to do. Sentries
guards round the city wall could witness that more than
they found me slipping secretly down from the battlem
by a rope. And then my new husband Deiphobus took m
force in defiance of the whole city and kept me a
wife.

Now, my husband, can you still think it just to kill
Would not justice rather prompt you to receive and c
fort me for the violence I have suffered, for the cruel sla
to which I have been born, through that which ough

lve been my glory? Do you hope to govern the gods? It is
t a wise thing to wish for.

RUS: Now, Queen, speak up for your children and your
untry! Break this spell of persuasiveness! Her words are
ausible, but she is a wicked woman. There is something
ister here!

ABE: First I will vindicate the goddesses and expose her
nders. I deny any god to be capable of such folly, as that
ra should be ready to bargain away her own city of Argos
foreigners, or Pallas to see her Athens become a dominion
Troy; when the truth is, they came to Mount Ida merely
r recreation and harmless indulgence. Why, indeed, should
ra so crave to be thought beautiful? To get herself a hus-
nd of higher rank than Zeus? Or was Athene, who peti-
ned Zeus for perpetual maidenhood because she hated
rriage, now husband-hunting among the gods? You dress
e gods in folly, to cloak your own guilt: you will take in
ne but fools. And Aphrodite, you said – what could be
re absurd? – travelled with my son Paris to visit Mene-
us! Could not Aphrodite have brought you, and your
hole town of Amyclae, from Hellas to Ilion, without stir-
g from her seat in heaven?

No! My son was exceptionally handsome; one look, and
ur appetite became your Aphrodite! Why, every lust men
el can be called love – the two words are the same except
their endings. Yes, you saw Paris in his gorgeous Eastern
bes, glittering with gold; and you went mad. In Argos
ur style and scope were somewhat limited; leave Sparta
hind, you thought, and Troy would be a perpetual foun-
n of gold for your extravagance to spill in floods! Mene-
us's palace was too confined a stage for your luxurious
olence to strut on.

Well, you say my son carried you off by force. Yet no
urtier in the palace heard. How loud did you call for
lp? Your brother Castor and his twin were both there

at the time – they had not yet been placed among stars.

Then, when you came to Troy, and the Argives were your track, and spear clashed against sword – whenever y heard of a Greek victory you must praise Menelaus, to mind my son of his dangerous rival and gall his heart w jealousy. When Troy gained ground, Menelaus was nowhe You kept your eye on events and became a practised follow of fortune; duty and loyalty did not concern you.

And then – this tale of escaping by ropes let down fr the battlements, of being kept here against your will should like to ask, when were you caught fitting a no round your neck or sharpening a dagger? That was the c vious course for any woman of breeding, if she pined for h former husband. In fact, I urged you again and again to lea Troy. I told you my sons could find other women to lo and I promised to help you slip out through the guards, ma your way to the Greek ships, and end the war for them a for us. No, the proposal did not please you. In Paris's hou you could queen it haughtily; you liked to see Orient kneel before you.

Now, to crown all, you come out here beautifully dress and groomed, you have the loathsome impudence to fa your husband in the eye of heaven, breathe the same air wi him! If you had any sense of your past crimes, if you we not utterly shameless, you would have come crawling a shivering, your dress in rags and your hair clipped to t scalp, to show some penitence.

Menelaus, this is my last word: crown the victory Hellas, be worthy of yourself; and by killing her establi everywhere the penalty of death for all unfaithful wives.

CHORUS: Menelaus, punish your wife in a manner worthy your race, and of your family. Let those who have r proached Greece and called you womanish be silenced your noble revenge!

MENELAUS: Your verdict agrees exactly with mine: that she deserted me for her lover of her own free will. Her talk of Aphrodite is mere invention and pretence. [*To* HELEN.] Get out of my sight! Death by stoning will be too short a penance for the long-drawn sufferings of Greece; but it will teach you not to disgrace me.

HELEN [*kneeling*]: The gods are to blame, not I. Do not kill me, I implore you; forgive me.

HECABE [*also kneeling*]: Remember your friends who died because of her. I speak for them and for their children, and beg you not to fail them now.

MENELAUS: Say no more, Hecabe; I am not listening to her. She shall go to Argos. Men, take her on board.

HECABE: Menelaus, let her not sail on the same ship with you!

MENELAUS: Why not? Is she heavier than she used to be?

HECABE: Once a lover, always a lover!

MENELAUS: That depends on the behaviour of the person loved. However, – as you wish, she shall not set foot on my ship – there's something in what you say. And when we reach Argos she shall pay for her shameful life with a shameful death, and commend all women to continence. No easy matter, that; but at least her end will put terror into their treacherous hearts, even if they hate us more than they did before.

MENELAUS *goes, the soldiers leading* HELEN *before him.*

CHORUS:

So, Zeus, our God, you have forsaken us; [*Strophe* 1
Given to Troy's enemies temple and ritual,
Smoke of rich spices, altar and incense-flame,
The holy Rock of Pergamus,
And Ida – dear remembered name –
Where steep snow-swollen rivers foam and fall
Through ivied forest-glades, past that bare height,
Earth's frontier, hushed with breath of gods, that glows
With dawn's first shaft of light.

Zeus, God, farewell! Now with your going goes [*Antistrop*
Music of prayer, sweet singing, mystic nights
Of darkness and of vision, the dear forms
Of golden gods we knew,
The Trojan Twelve, the full-moon festal rites.
Therefore we ask, Monarch of all that lives,
Firm in your heavenly throne,
While the destroying Fury gives
Our homes to ashes and our flesh to worms –
We ask, and ask: What does this mean to You?

Dearest husband, dear lost ghost, [*Strop*
Seas and worlds divide our ways:
You, unwashed, unburied,
Roam the shadowy spaces,
I to Argos wing the sea with restless oars,
To the Cyclops' walls of stone
Rising heaven-high from green turf where horses graze.
At Troy's gates our children
Cling and cry by hundreds,
Calling, wailing, 'Mother, they are taking me
From you! See their dark ships,
Oars and rowers ready!
Will our home be holy Salamis,
Or the peak between two seas
Where the gate of Isthmus
Guards the Spartan stronghold?'

And when Menelaus' ship
In mid-ocean rides and runs
May there fall a furious
Thunderbolt from heaven,
Blaze amidships, burn his oars and break his keel!
Fall while I, poor prisoner, sail,

Lost in weeping, farther every hour from home;
Fall while Helen gazes
In her golden mirror
Aping girlhood! May she never come safe home
To the streets of Sparta
And the Brazen Temple!
She whose lightness shamed the pride of Greece,
Fouled with blood and tears of Troy
The once pure and lovely
Waters of Simois!

Look, oh, look, you weeping wives of Troy!
Stroke on stroke
Scars our bleeding land!
See, the dead Astyanax,
Whom the Greeks
Murdered without mercy,
Flung from Troy's high towers!

Enter TALTHYBIUS *with the body of* ASTYANAX *carried on* HECTOR'S *shield.*

ALTHYBIUS: Hecabe: one ship of Neoptolemus still rides at anchor, waiting to sail to Phthia with the remainder of the spoils belonging to him; but Neoptolemus himself has gone. He received disturbing news from home, where it appears that Peleus his grandfather has been expelled from his throne and country by Acastus son of Peleas. Neoptolemus had no wish to linger; and on hearing this news he hastened his departure, and took Andromache with him. She, poor woman, as the ship left shore, wept aloud for her country and called on Hector's grave. I confess, she brought tears to my eyes. Well, she begged Neoptolemus that this child, your grandson, who was put to death as directed, should be given proper burial; asking especially that this bronze-ribbed shield, the terror of the Achaeans, which used to protect his father's body in battle, should serve him instead of a coffin

of cedar-wood or stone; she could not bear that it should g to the palace of Peleus, to be a silent reproachful witness her second marriage. She desired that the child should b given into your care, to dress and adorn his body as well you can in the circumstances; since she herself was pr vented from staying to bury him by her master's impatien to be off.

Now, as soon as you have made him ready, I will see th he is laid to rest in the earth, and we will hoist sail. So d what you have been asked to do as quickly as possible. Or trouble I have saved you: as I came along by the Scamande I bathed him in running water and washed his wounds. I a going now to break the ground for his grave. If we both d our best to waste no time, between us we shall very soon ge under way for home.

TALTHYBIUS *goes. The soldiers bearing* ASTYANAX *obe* HECABE'S *direction to lay the shield on the ground; then follo him out.*

HECABE: Bring the round shield of Hector; set it here. [*The lay it at her feet.*] The sight of it should be welcome to me instead, it stabs my eyes.

O you Achaeans, you are fine fighters; but where is you pride? Did you so dread this boy that you must invent a nev death for him? Did you fear that some day he would rais Troy from the dust? When Hector held the field, with thousand men fighting at his side, even then we fell befor your swords; and to-day, with the city taken and ever Trojan dead, still you shook with fear before this babe: ar you not proved cowards? There is one thing worse tha fear – that is fear without reason!

Darling child, there is deep bitterness in your death. I you had died fighting for your city, knowing the pride o manhood, the sweetness of love, and the godlike glory c royalty, your death would have been a blessed one – if i this world there is any place for blessing. But though yo

saw and recognized this richness of life which was your inheritance, my son, yet it was never yours to enjoy; and to-day your infant ghost has no knowledge of it.

Poor little head, your curls were a garden where your mother loved to plant her kisses – how roughly they were parted by your own city's bastions, built by the God of Foreknowledge! Now through the shattered skull the blood gleams, mocking. ... No more words, or I shall offend. Your little hands – how like your father's they are! but now they hang limply from your arms. Dear, dead lips, do you remember your promises? You leant over my bed and said, When you die, Grandmother, I will cut a long curl of my hair for you, and I will bring all my friends to honour your grave with gifts and holy words. But you have broken your promise, young man; instead, I am burying you – I, an old woman who has lost her city, her children, and her happiness.

All my fond kisses, anxious care, sleepless nights – all have ended in this. What epitaph, I wonder, would a poet write for him? 'This child the Argives feared, and therefore killed.' The story brings little credit to Hellas.

Well, though you lose your father's throne and lands, you shall have his bronze-fronted shield for your bed below the earth. Dear shield! You guarded Hector's splendid arm faithfully, as he kept you; and you have lost him. Here on your handgrip is the print of his palm; here, where his beard pressed your smooth rounded rim, ran the sweat which daily in the heat of battle flowed from Hector's brow.

[*To* CHORUS.] Come, bring whatever robes you can lay hands on, to cover his body. My son, Fate forbids us to bring any handsome gift; but such as we can bring you shall have.

If any man feels solid satisfaction at what he calls his established position in life, he is a fool. For the forces that control our lives are as unpredictable in their behaviour as any capering idiot. Assured happiness? – there is no such thing.

CHORUS: Look, Hecabe; we have brought cloaks taken fro
our Trojan dead, to wrap round the child.

HECABE: Dear child, your father's mother lays on you the
gifts, not as a prize for racing with horses or shooting wi
the bow – these things among Phrygians are honoured
due proportion; but gifts from the remnant of all that w
once yours, now taken from you by Helen whom the go
abhor, who has robbed you even of your life, and utter
destroyed your father's house.

CHORUS: Yesterday so great a prince,
Now a sight to break my heart!

HECABE: Now I fasten on your shoulder the purple and gol
you should have worn for your wedding, to lead home th
most royal bride in Asia. And you, dear Hector's shiel
triumphant once, mother of many victories, here is yo
crown: an honour far more richly deserved than any th
Greeks may give to the shield of that crafty coward Odysseu
Earth shall receive you, the undying, with the dead,

CHORUS:
Earth shall receive you, child, with anguish and tears.
Mother, intone the dirge for the dead.

HECABE: Farewell!

CHORUS: Farewell, dead by the curse of Heaven!

HECABE: Farewell!
Here's linen to close your wounds. This wound I'll heal,
And this. Pitiful healer, having skill
But not the effect of healing! All the rest
Your father's hands shall tend in the home of death.

CHORUS: Beat the breast and bruise the head;
Let the hand be merciless!

HECABE: I see the abyss of darkness. Dear, dear friends –

CHORUS: What now, Hecabe? Courage! Tell us your thought

HECABE: All through these years the gods have never pur
posed any other destiny than this, both for me and for Troy
whom they chose out of all cities for their especial hate. Ou

continued prayers and sacrifices have all been futile. For what purpose have we suffered? To give songs to singers of the future? That poets might make plays about us? If the gods now should overturn the earth and engulf us, we should vanish and be forgotten; perhaps that would be better.

Go now and lay him in his pitiful grave. He has his funeral robe and garland – such as they are; but no more is needed. A costly funeral proclaims only the self-conceit of the living; I think the dead care little for such things.

CHORUS:

Weep for Andromache – all her strong hopes broken
With this broken body! And weep for him
Whose royal birth the world envied and honoured
Whose death will be told with terror.

HECABE: Look! Who are they,
There on the city heights, waving their arms
With torches ablaze? What is to happen now?

Enter TALTHYBIUS, *attended.*

TALTHYBIUS [*shouting*]: Let those officers appointed to fire the city now bring out their torches and use them well! Up with the flames! When the citadel's down we leave Troy for ever, and hoist for home! [*To the* CHORUS.] The same order concerns you too. As soon as you hear a loud blast on the trumpet sound at headquarters, make your way to the ships and be ready to sail. Hecabe: I am very sorry for you, but you must go with these men; they have come for you from Odysseus, to whom you were allotted.

HECABE: It has come at last – gods have pity on me! This is the crown of my sufferings, my last ordeal: to sail away and leave Troy in flames. Up, aged feet; if you can climb so far, I will stand here and bid farewell to my poor city. [*She climbs on to a step and faces the city.*]

Troy! Once among the cities of Asia you drew the breath of pride and your name was glorious. Now your name shall vanish. They are burning you: me they are carrying away as

a slave. Gods, gods! – Why call on them? We called befo
and they did not listen.

Now! Into the fire! I'll die like a queen, in the arms of
burning city! [*She makes towards the flames, but is seized by
soldiers.*]

TALTHYBIUS: Poor creature! You are out of your mind, v
all you have been through. – You men, make sure of h
she belongs to Odysseus, and she must be delivered to h
safely.

HECABE [*sobbing violently*]:

Zeus, our maker, begetter, Lord of our land!
We are Dardanus' children! See: is our torment just?

CHORUS:

He sees, and the flames burn on. The Mother of Cities
Is now no city; Troy is no longer Troy.

HECABE:

Troy is a beacon – look! On the hill every house
blazing;
Along the crest of the ramparts, over the roofs,
The fire rushes and roars in the wake of the spear!

CHORUS:

Troy in her fearful fall has faded, vanished
At the breath of War, as smoke at the beating of wings!

HECABE [*kneeling and gazing at the ground*]:

Listen, Phrygian earth that nursed my children! [*Stro*
Listen, my sons! You know your mother's voice.

CHORUS:

No more prayers to the gods:
Call the dead in a ghostly chant!

HECABE:

I call the dead, I who am near to death,
Stretched on the soil, my hands beating the ground.

CHORUS [*kneeling with her*]:

We will kneel at your side,
Call on our dear lost dead below.

CABE: Listen, souls of the dead!
ORUS: Tell them our torment!
CABE: We are driven like cattle far from home,
Away to a house of slavery!
Dead Priam, do you hear,
Unburied and unwept?
No, your ghost knows nothing of my agony.
ORUS: Though he died
By unholy murder,
Holy Death
Darkly closed his eyes.
CABE:
Listen, temples of gods, beloved city, [*Antistrophe*
Ravaged with flame, flowing with guiltless blood!
ORUS:
Soon you will fall, and lie
With the earth you loved, and none shall name you!
CABE:
Dust mingled with smoke spreads wings to the sky,
I can see nothing, the world is blotted out!
ORUS: Earth and her name are nothing;
All has vanished, and Troy is nothing!
A distant crash is heard.
CABE: Listen, friends – did you hear?
ORUS: Pergamus fell!
CABE: Reverberations rock the walls,
Each ruin reels and sinks engulfed!
Come, trembling aged feet,
You must not fail me now.
There your way lies: forward into slavery!
ORUS: Farewell, Troy!
Now the lifted oar
Waits for us:
Ships of Greece, we come!
Exeunt.

HELEN

*

Characters:

HELEN, *daughter of Zeus and Leda*
TEUCER, *a Greek*
CHORUS *of captive Spartan women*
MENELAUS, *husband of Helen and King of Sparta*
OLD WOMAN, *portress at the palace*
MESSENGER, *one of Menelaus' crew*
THEONOE, *sister of Theoclymenus*
THEOCLYMENUS, *King of Egypt*
MESSENGER, *servant of Theoclymenus*
THE DIOSCORI, *sons of Zeus and Leda, now deified*

*

e scene is Egypt, before the royal palace, not far from the shore. On one side of the stage is a monument enshrining a stone sarcophagus, at which HELEN *has taken sanctuary.*

ELEN: This is Egypt; here flows the virgin river, the lovely Nile, who brings down melted snow to slake the soil of the Egyptian plain with the moisture heaven denies. Proteus, while he lived, was King here, ruling the whole of Egypt from his palace on the island of Pharos. Now Proteus married Psamathe, one of the sea-nymphs, and formerly the wife of Aeacus. She bore Proteus two children: a son, Theoclymenus (a name contradicted by his impious life) and a daughter, the apple of her mother's eye, called Eido when she was a child; when she grew up and was ripe for marriage they called her Theonoe, for she had divine knowledge of all things present and to come – a gift inherited from her grandfather Nereus.

But I am not an Egyptian; my home country is a place of some note – Sparta; and my father was Tyndareus. There is –

you know – a legend which says that Zeus took the feather
form of a swan, and that being pursued by an eagle, and flyi
for refuge to the bosom of my mother, Leda, he used this d
ceit to accomplish his desire upon her. That is the story
my origin – if it is true. My name is Helen. Now let me t
you of my misfortunes.

The three goddesses, Hera, Aphrodite, and Athene, daug
ter of Zeus, came as rivals to the glen of Mount Ida, whe
Paris lived, each one eager to be judged the first in beaut
And *my* beauty – if so great a misfortune can be so named
was used by Aphrodite as the bribe by which she won t
prize, promising Paris that he should marry me. So Paris l
his dairy-farm on Mount Ida and came to Sparta to win me
his bride.

But Hera, baulked of her victory over the other goddesse
in her resentment turned the substance of Aphrodite
promise into air. She gave the royal son of Priam for h
bride – not me, but a living image compounded of the eth
in my likeness. Paris believes that he possesses me: what h
holds is nothing but an airy delusion.

And Zeus by his subsequent arrangements has added to n
misfortune. He brought war upon Hellas and the unhapp
Phrygians, to ease the swarming earth of her measurele
burden of men and make Achilles famous among the fighte
of Greece. The Helen who went to Phrygia as a prize f
Troy to defend and the Greeks to fight for – that Helen w
not I, only my name. Zeus did not forget me: I was taken b
Hermes, wrapped in a cloud, borne through the secr
places of the upper air, and set down here in the palace
Proteus, whom Zeus picked out as the most honourable
all men, so that I might preserve my chastity inviolate f
Menelaus. So here I have lived, while my poor husban
gathered an army and in pursuit of his stolen wife sailed t
the fortress of Troy. Many souls of men perished for my sak
by the river Scamander; and I, the centre of these trag

events, am named with curses, as the betrayer of my husband, who brought upon Greece the pestilence of war.

Why do I still live? Because Hermes told me this: once my husband learns that I did not go to Troy to accept the embraces of a lover, I shall once again live with him in the famous land of Sparta. As long as Proteus lived my marriage was not threatened; now he is in his dark grave, and his son Theoclymenus is pestering me to marry him. So in loyalty to my true husband I have come here as a suppliant to the tomb of Proteus, praying him to preserve me for Menelaus; so that even if my name is reviled in Hellas, here in Egypt I may keep my body free from reproach.

Enter TEUCER.

TEUCER: Who is master of this imposing palace? These royal precincts, that magnificent pediment, suggest the very house of Plutus, the temple of Wealth. [*With a sudden cry he catches sight of* HELEN.] Ye gods! What do I see? It is the accursed woman – her very image! The murderess who blasted my life and ruined Greece! May the gods abhor you as the perfect copy of Helen! If I were not standing on foreign soil, with this good arrow I would take your life in payment for your likeness to the daughter of Zeus!

HELEN: What do you say? Poor soul, who are you? Why do you shrink from me? You say I am like Helen: why blame me for that? Why hate me because of what happened to her?

TEUCER: I was wrong; I let anger get the better of me. The daughter of Zeus is hated all over Hellas. Forgive what I said.

HELEN: But who are you? Where have you come from?

TEUCER: I am one of those ruined Greeks.

HELEN: No wonder, then, that you hate Helen. But who are you? Of what country, what family?

TEUCER: My name is Teucer; my father is Telamon, and I was born and brought up in Salamis.

HELEN: Then what brings you here to the valley of the Nile?

TEUCER: I have been driven out my father's land. I am
exile.

HELEN: That is hard. Who drove you out?

TEUCER: The man who should have loved me most: my o
father, Telamon.

HELEN: Exiled you! There must have been some seri
reason. What had happened?

TEUCER: I had a brother, Aias; his death at Troy was
cause of it.

HELEN: How? You did not kill him yourself?

TEUCER: No. He died by his own hand, his own sword.

HELEN: Was he mad? Surely no man in his right mind co
do it?

TEUCER: I will tell you. You have heard of Achilles, son
Peleus?

HELEN: He was one of the suitors of Helen – so I have hear

TEUCER: At his death he left his armour to be competed f
by those who had fought with him.

HELEN: And how did that hurt Aias?

TEUCER: He ended his life because the armour was award
to another man.

HELEN: And his troubles were the cause of your exile?

TEUCER: Yes, because I did not die at his side.

HELEN: So you too went to the famous city of Ilion?

TEUCER: I was in at the death – and lost my own life for n
pains.

HELEN: Is the city now burnt and destroyed?

TEUCER: Utterly. Not even the outline of the walls can
traced.

HELEN: Oh, Helen, Helen! It was for you Troy died!

TEUCER: Troy? Greece too! Untold harm has been done.

HELEN: How long is it since the city was sacked?

TEUCER: Seven harvests have been reaped since Troy l
barren.

HELEN: And before that, how long had you been there?

UCER: Months without number – ten interminable years.
LEN: And did you capture the Spartan queen?
UCER: Menelaus took her – dragged her off by the hair.
LEN: Poor woman! Did you see her? Or are you telling me
vhat you heard?
UCER: I saw her as plainly as I see you now.
LEN: Is it not possible that the gods made you all imagine
his?
UCER: Talk about something else – that is enough of Helen.
LEN: Then – you all really believed it was true?
UCER: Why, I saw her with my own eyes carried off by
Menelaus.
LEN: And is Menelaus now at home – with his wife?
UCER: Not in Argos, certainly; nor in Sparta.
LEN: That is sad news – for those who hoped for better.
UCER: He is said to have vanished, and his wife with
im.
LEN: But surely all the Argives were sailing home together?
UCER: They were; but a storm scattered them in all direc-
ions.
LEN: Where were they when the storm fell?
UCER: Cresting the rollers of the mid-Aegean.
LEN: And since then – no one has news of his landing any-
vhere?
UCER: No one. He is generally reported as dead.
LEN [*aside*]: Dead! What shall I do? [*To* TEUCER.] And
vhat of Leda? Is she alive?
UCER: No, Leda is dead and gone.
LEN: Can it be that Helen's disgrace broke her heart?
UCER: So they say; she was of royal blood. She hanged
erself.
LEN: And her two sons by Tyndareus – are they alive or
ead?
UCER: Dead and not dead; of them there are two different
ccounts.

HELEN: Tell me the truer. [*Aside.*] My mother – how ca
bear it?

TEUCER: It is said they were deified – in the form of stars.

HELEN: That would be well. What was the other?

TEUCER: That shame for their sister drove them to end th
lives with the sword. But enough of tales – I have wept
these things once already.

My reason for coming here to the king's palace was to
the prophetess Theonoe, and ask for divine help in gettin
fair wind for Cyprus. Will you take me to her? An oracle
Apollo told me I was to settle in Cyprus, and give to my n
home there the name of Salamis, in remembrance of t
other island where I was born.

HELEN: From here to Cyprus is plain sailing; but you m
get clear of land before Theoclymenus sees you. He is t
king of this country, and at present he is away slaughteri
wild beasts with the aid of hounds. Every Greek that
captures here he kills. Why? don't ask me – I won't tell yc
What good would it do you?

TEUCER: Just as you say, my lady; and thank you for telli
me. The gods reward you for your kindness! You are li
Helen only in appearance; in heart you are utterly differe
I pray she may never reach home, but come to a bad er
But you – good luck be with you always!

Exit TEUCER.

HELEN:

Strong griefs ask strong lamenting. Who shall be
Pattern and partner to my crying soul?
What tearful song can match the toll
Of deep pain paid by silent misery?

Come, Seiren maidens, daughters of Earth, [*Strophe*
Young and light of wing,
Come with Libyan flute, with pipe and string,
Bring music for my despair,

Share your tears to suit my sorrow,
Couple note with note, pain with my pain;
And when songs of death,
Solemn chants dear to departed souls,
Ring through the vaulted shades of death,
Hear and accept them, Queen Persephone,
Echoes of my heart's agony,
Offerings to fill my tears' deficiency.

The CHORUS *begin to enter.*

CHORUS:

Where the spring grass grows rank beside blue water [*Antistrophe* 1
I was at work, spreading
Purple clothes on the young reeds to dry
In golden heat of the sun;
When I heard my lady's voice, a pitiful cry,
A joyless clamour of pain,
An anguished wail of loss –
What could it be? –
Like the hunted scream of a woodland nymph
At bay in the echoing depths of a rocky cave,
Caught and spoiled by the lust of Pan.

HELEN:

Women of Greece, victims of piracy! [*Strophe* 2
Listen: a Grecian sailor has been here
Bringing new tears to flow with those I had.
Great Troy lies dead: fire is her monument.
And I – my hated name – must bear the guilt
Of countless agonies and countless dead.
Leda is dead; for her, my name's disgrace
Fastened the noose. My husband's lost from sight,
His endless voyage ended in death. My brothers,
Their country's glory and pride, are seen no more
Riding like thunder through the reedy marsh,
Or wrestling with their fellows by the stream.

CHORUS:

Weep for Helen, victim of Destiny! [*Antistroph*
Mocked cruelly with the gift of life, when Zeus
Swan-winged like snow swooping thro' dazzled air
Touched Leda's womb! Your single life has known
All sorrow, knows it still. Leda is dead;
Twin sons of Zeus, your brothers are no more;
Your eyes can never see your native land;
Rumour through every state and street in Greece
Gives you as paramour to a foreign prince;
Your husband's life is lost in the salt sea;
And you will no more gladden your dear home
Or thank Athene in her brazen temple.

HELEN:

Whose was the Trojan hand that felled [*Stroph*
The fateful pine whose timbers held
Tears for the Trojans, tears for Greece?
Thence the accursed ship was built
That brought to Sparta Priam's son
(A dark-skinned slave at each oar-hilt)
To seek my beauty, break my peace,
And tempt my heart with love and guilt.
With Paris, till his prize was won,
Came murderous Aphrodite, mistress of deceit –
Goddess, what have you done? –
To prostrate Greece and Troy in slaughter at her feet.

Then Hera, loved of Zeus, who shares [*Antistroph*
His golden throne and soothes his cares,
Sent the swift-footed Hermes down.
He found me gathering in a glade
Fresh roses folded in my gown,
An offering for the Holy Maid;
Carried me swiftly through the sky
Into this land of little joy,

o live accursed and know that I
nt my own race to bloody war with Ilion.
Now by the shores of Troy
y fair name is reviled for wrong I have not done.

ORUS: You have cause for sorrow, I know; but it is best
bear what burdens life lays upon us as cheerfully as we
n.

LEN: Burdens! Look, what a millstone life has hung round
y neck! From the moment my mother bore me I was
inted at for a freak. It's not usual in Hellas or anywhere
se for a woman to produce her young enclosed in a white
ell – which is the way Leda is said to have borne me, with
eus for my father! Since then every fresh misfortune – in
ct my whole life has been a freak; partly through Hera's
ult, partly because my very beauty led to my taking on an
ntrue and hideous appearance in the eyes of the world. Oh,
the picture could have been wiped out and painted over
ain, to give me my true beauty, so that the Greeks could
rget the blemishes I now possess, and remember the good
stead of the bad!

When a man broods on a single misfortune and feels the
ds are against him, though his suffering is real, it can be
orne; but I am crushed by innumerable blows at once. In
e first place, though I am innocent, my name is a byword
f reproach; and if there is any worse fate than suffering for
al crimes, it is suffering for crimes that were never com-
itted. Then, the gods have uprooted me from my home,
d planted me among an outlandish race, where I am friend-
ss, and degraded from nobility to slavery; for in a country
ke this all are slaves except one man. The sole anchor of
ope that I cling to, that some day my husband would come
d rescue me, – that hope has gone, if he is dead. And my
other is dead, and men say I killed her – say it unjustly, but
is an injustice I must bear. My daughter, the pride of her
ome, and of her mother, grows grey in virginity; and my

two brothers, whom they call the sons of Zeus, are
Meanwhile, surrounded by so many disasters, in this
believe situation I too am dead, though in fact I am alive
crown all, even if I were to reach my home, Sparta
shut the door on me as a foreigner; for they all think
swallowed me together with Menelaus. For if he were
we would recognize each other by certain secrets know
us alone. But he is not alive; I shall never see him agai

Then why should I go on living? What is left to me
To save my life I can choose to marry Theoclymenus, to
as an Egyptian wife, the lady of a great house. But an o
husband makes even wealth odious. The wisest course is
die.

How can I do it well? A rope? No. I will not be seen d
ling in a noose. Even slaves think it beneath them. To s
with a knife has a certain touch of royalty, of heroism.
that way of escape hurts, and I shrink from it. What a d
of desperation! Beauty is a blessing to other women
reduces *me* to this!

CHORUS: Helen, you should not assume that this Gr
whoever he may be, told you nothing but the truth.

HELEN: He told me clearly enough that Menelaus was de

CHORUS: Many tales might be clear, and yet not true.

HELEN: Truth itself is often bewildering.

CHORUS: You dwell on the worst that may happen, inst
of the best.

HELEN: Fear grips me and drives me to the thought th
dread.

CHORUS: Tell me – how much good-will have you in
palace?

HELEN: They are all my friends, except the man who is b
on marrying me.

CHORUS: Then listen: this is what you must do: leave y
sanctuary here and –

HELEN: Leave sanctuary? What are you suggesting?

ORUS: Go to the house of Theonoe, daughter of the sea. he possesses all knowledge: enquire of her whether your usband is alive or dead; and when you have a clear answer ou may rejoice or weep accordingly. Before you know for ertain, what do you gain by grieving? Do as I suggest: leave his tomb, go to Theonoe, and you will know everything. When you have here in the palace one who can tell you the ruth and is also your friend, why look further? I will willngly go myself and join with you in asking her for a divine evelation. Women ought to help each other.

LEN: Friends, I will do as you say.
Into the palace, quickly in,
To learn what I must lose or win!

ORUS: We are ready now, at your word.

LEN: I tremble! This is a day
Of fear: what answer waits to be heard?
What doom of tears?

ORUS: But why
Be sure of the worst, and weep too soon?

LEN: What bitter fate has my husband found?
Does he live to see the sun
Charioting the sky,
And the journeys of stars and moon?
Or has his soul begun
Its endless, lifeless exile under ground?

ORUS: Whatever is to come,
Helen, accept and use for the best.

LEN: Eurotas, river of home,
With reedy banks of green,
If report of him is true,
If death holds him at rest,
Hear what I swear to do —!

ORUS: This is folly! What do you mean?

LEN:
o die! I will swing high,

My throat in a choking rope,
Or the hand shall war on the wincing skin
And eager iron shall grope
And blood leap forth where the deadly blade passed in;
My death a sacrifice
To the three goddesses, and to Priam's son,
The shepherd whose heart was won,
The judge whose word was bought
For Aphrodite's price.

CHORUS:

Hold to this happier thought,
That the clouds of fear may pass unshed.

HELEN:

Weep for the tears of Troy!
For Troy, deeds without name have bred
Pain without end. Aphrodite, goddess of joy,
Gave, and I was her gift; thence without respite sprang
Anguish of blood and tears and deep despair;
Mothers of Troy wailed for their vanished sons;
Sisters knelt by Scamander's brims to hang
On new-made tombs locks of their virgin hair.

But listen! Loud and full
Through Hellas too the same river of weeping runs,
And hands are clasped over the stricken head,
And nerveless fingers clutch and pull
The unfeeling flesh till the nails are red.

Happy Arcadian girl, who long ago
Lay in the bed of Zeus! For you, once fair,
Still in the rough pelt of a shambling bear
Made your shape gentle with your eyes' soft glow.
Beauty, that tortures me, to you was kind:
With it, you left the pangs of grief behind.

nd Merops' daughter, happy too was she,
he Titan maid, whom for her beauty's flower
rtemis drove out from her company
nd turned her to a hind with horns of gold;
ut my curs'd beauty damned with deadly power
rojan and wandering Greek to sufferings untold.

HELEN *and* CHORUS *exeunt into the palace. Enter* MENELAUS.

NELAUS: O Pelops my grandfather, winner of your famous
nariot-race against Oenomaus at Pisa! How I wish that on
ie same day when you were prepared as a banquet for the
ods, you had ended your life forthwith between immortal
eth! Then you could never have begotten my father
treus; who in his turn was father, by his wife Aerope, to
gamemnon and myself, a celebrated pair of sons. In fact,
y opinion is – I say this without any wish to boast – that,
the two of us, I took the larger part in the transporting of
ir armament by sea to Troy; a monarch owing his authority
ot to superior force, but to the willing obedience of the
ghting men of Hellas.

Many of those men are dead; many others – the exact
gure is ascertainable – rejoice in a happy escape from the
erils of the sea, and have returned home bringing with them
kens and keepsakes of those who died. But I, through all
e years since I overthrew the towers of Troy, have been an
nhappy wanderer upon the stormy wastes of the grey ocean.
long to reach my own country; but the gods have not
ought me worthy. I have sailed into every desolate landing-
ace, every hostile port, on the Libyan coast. Every time
near the shores of my own country a storm drives me back;
favouring wind ever fills my sail to bring me home.

And now here I am on this coast, a wretched castaway, all
y friends lost; our ship broken in a thousand pieces against
e rocks. But a curiously-fitted keel remained intact, and
this, with much difficulty, and much to my surprise, I

was able to get ashore, and with me Helen, whom I dra
off from Troy. What country this is, what nation inhabit
I have no idea. I could have enquired; but I preferred nc
meet people in my present embarrassing costume, w
decency demands should be kept out of sight. A man ac
tomed to high position feels misfortune more than one
is inured to it. I am, in fact, exhausted: no food, no cloth
these rags I have on are what I could save from the wr
as anyone can see. My usual clothes – rich cloaks, soft go
– the sea has taken them all. But I have my wife – the so
of all my sufferings; and before coming up here I hid her
cave together with the survivors of my company,
ordered them to guard her for me. I have come alon
procure any supplies I can find for them. As soon as I
this palace I approached it; the high surrounding wall,
imposing entrance, indicate a man of wealth. Sailors in n
may hope for something from a well-stocked house; otl
wise we shall die; for a whole ship's crew, if they can ge
supplies, can give no help, however willing. [*He sho*
Hallo, there! Porter! Come to the door, and take a mes
in for me. I need help.

An OLD WOMAN *answers from inside.*

OLD WOMAN: Who's that at the door? Go away, will y
Don't stand there in the porch disturbing my master!
you'll get killed: you're a Greek, and we have no deali
with Greeks.

MENELAUS: Old woman, these are empty threats. I
speak bluntly, for I've no time to spare. Come on, undo
bolt!

She opens the door and appears.

OLD WOMAN: Go away! My orders are that no Greek s
come near the house.

MENELAUS: Look here, don't shake your finger at me
push me about.

OLD WOMAN: It's your fault; you won't do what I tell y

ENELAUS: Go and tell your master I'm here.
LD WOMAN: I wouldn't take the risk of delivering your nessage.
ENELAUS: I'm a shipwrecked man; he would not dare to iarm me.
D WOMAN: Now you go away from here to some other iouse.
ENELAUS: I won't. I'm coming in. Do as I tell you.
D WOMAN: I tell you you're troublesome. Before long ou'll be thrown out.
NELAUS: Ah! If only I had my army here!
D WOMAN: No doubt you were a great man in your army; ere you're not.
NELAUS: Gods! that I should suffer such indignity!
D WOMAN: Ha! Tears in your eyes! Who do you think is orry for you?
NELAUS: The gods were once kind to me.
D WOMAN: Then go away and bestow your tears on your riends.
NELAUS: What country is this? Whose is this palace?
D WOMAN: This is Proteus' palace; and the country is gypt.
NELAUS: Egypt! Could anything be worse? What a place) have reached!
D WOMAN: Why do you speak ill of the jewel of the Nile?
NELAUS: I did not. I was groaning at my own misfortune.
D WOMAN: Many are unfortunate; you are not the only ne.
NELAUS: Is this king – whatever you called him – at home?
D WOMAN: This is his tomb. His son reigns now.
NELAUS: Then where is his son, at home or away?
D WOMAN: He is not at home. And he is a bitter enemy f all Greeks.
NELAUS: Why does he hate Greeks – so unhappily for me?
D WOMAN: Helen is in this palace, the daughter of Zeus.

MENELAUS: What? What did you say? Say that again.

OLD WOMAN: The daughter of Tyndareus, who used to
in Sparta.

MENELAUS: But where did she come from? What can
mean?

OLD WOMAN: Why, she came here from Lacedaemon.

MENELAUS: When? [*Aside.*] Surely my wife can't have b
kidnapped out of the cave?

OLD WOMAN: Before the Greeks went to Troy, my frie
But get away from this house. There's an extraordi
trouble that's upsetting us just now; you have come
most unfortunate time. If my master catches you, your
come will be death. I'm a friend to you Greeks, in spit
what I said; I spoke harshly for fear of my master.

Exit.

MENELAUS: What does it mean? What can I think? This s
of hers seems to alter the whole situation. Is it possible
I should capture my wife in Troy, bring her here and put
in a cave for safety, and now find another woman, with
same name as my wife, living in this palace? But she ca
this woman the daughter of Zeus! Can there be a *man* by
name of Zeus living on the banks of the Nile? There's
one Zeus, the one in heaven. And where in the worl
there a Sparta, except on the reedy banks of the lo
Eurotas? Are there two men called Tyndareus? Is th
another Lacedaemon, another Troy? I don't know wha
say.

Well, after all, the world's a big place: no doubt m
women have the same names – many towns too. The
really nothing to wonder at. Nor is there anything to
away from in a slave's threats. No man could be so
civilized as to refuse me food – once he heard my name.
fire of Troy is famous; so is the man who lit it – known
over the world: Menelaus!

I will wait for the master of the house. That means

ings to look out for: if the man's a savage, I must first hide, en get back to the wreck; if he shows any softness, I must sure to ask for the provisions we need. – This, then, was e final humiliation in store for me, that I should beseech a llow-king for bread to keep me alive! Well, I must. *Noth-g is stronger than necessity* – I did not invent that proverb, but 's true none the less, and very well known.

Re-enter CHORUS.

ORUS: When in her need my lady Helen
Went to the royal palace to enquire,
I heard the virgin prophetess say
That King Menelaus has not vanished
To the land of shadows under the earth
Where light is dark, but lives, the sport
Of the stormy seas, and never yet
Has moored in the harbour of his own city;
But sick with travel, stripped of friends,
Has grounded keel, in his voyage from Troy,
On every shore between East and West.

Re-enter HELEN.

EN: Now, back to my place of sanctuary – but Theonoe's swer has warmed my heart! She knows everything, and it true! She says openly that my husband is alive, alive! that wanders endlessly from sea to sea, this way and that; but last, when he is exhausted with travel, and reaches the pointed end of his sufferings, he will come! – One thing e did not tell me, whether after coming he will get safely way; but I was so overjoyed at hearing he was alive that I frained from pressing her further. She says that he's some-here near at hand, that he has been wrecked, and has nded with only a few companions. Oh, Menelaus, hen will you come? How I long to see you! [*She sees m.*]

Oh! Who is that? He is lying in wait for me – this is some crilegious plot of Theoclymenus! Quick, to the tomb,

fast as the wind, fast as frenzy! He means to capture
What a wild look he has!

MENELAUS: Listen to me! Stop clutching so desperate
that tomb – those altar pillars – wait! Why run away?
Ah! now that you show me your face, you strike me spe
less with astonishment.

HELEN: Friends, this is a cruel wrong! He is keeping me
from sanctuary! He is going to seize me, and give me as
to the king, whom I hate!

MENELAUS: I'm not a criminal, nor has anyone sent m
commit any crime.

HELEN: Are you not? But you're dressed in rags!

MENELAUS [*returning from the tomb*]: Don't run away; th
nothing to be afraid of.

HELEN: Now that I can cling to the tomb, I'll stay.

MENELAUS: Who are you? Whose face am I looking at?

HELEN: But who are *you*? We are both in the same perple

MENELAUS: I never saw anyone more exactly like –

HELEN: O gods! Yes, there is something godlike in re
nition!

MENELAUS: Are you a Greek, or a native here?

HELEN: A Greek. I want to know your country too.

MENELAUS: To me you appear to be exactly like Helen!

HELEN: To me you look like Menelaus! I don't know wh
think.

MENELAUS: You are right! I am Menelaus – to my sorro

HELEN [*stretching out her arms*]: Come to me – I am your w
I have waited so long for you! [*She kneels, clasps his rags,
kisses them.*]

MENELAUS: Wife? What do you mean? Leave my clo
alone!

HELEN: I am! My father Tyndareus gave me to you!

MENELAUS: Hecate, bringer of light, send me good drea

HELEN: I am not a dream, Hecate has not sent me!

MENELAUS: But neither am I the husband of two women

EN: What other woman's husband are you?

ELAUS: I left her hidden in the cave – I was bringing her
ck from Troy.

EN: You have no wife other than me.

ELAUS: I am not mad – can there be something wrong
th my sight?

EN: There is nothing wrong! When you look at me do
u not know that I am your wife?

ELAUS: In appearance you are the same; but the mystery
it baffles me.

EN: Look at me! What plainer proof do you want?

ELAUS: You are like her; that I don't deny.

EN: Then what evidence should you trust, if not your eyes?

ELAUS: My difficulty is this: I have another wife!

EN: I did not go to Troy. That was a phantom.

ELAUS: And who can make a phantom that lives and
eathes?

EN: Air! It was the gods' work. That wife of yours is
de – of air!

ELAUS: Which of the gods made her? I never heard of
h a thing!

EN: Hera made her as a substitute for me, so that Paris
uld not have me.

ELAUS: What? Then you were here and in Troy at the
ne time?

EN: A name can be in any number of places: a person can
ly be in one place. [*She clasps his hand.*]

ELAUS: Let go! I had enough to plague me before I came.

EN: Will you leave me, and go away with your phantom
fe?

ELAUS: Yes! You are too much like Helen; so good-bye!

EN: You kill me to say so. I have found you, my husband,
l now I cannot keep you!

ELAUS: The memory of what I went through at Troy is
re convincing than you are.

HELEN [*weeping*]: Oh, oh! was anyone ever so miserable husband is leaving me again; I shall never live in my country or see my own home again!

Enter a MESSENGER, *one of* MENELAUS'S *men.*

MESSENGER: Menelaus, here you are at last! I have wandering all over this outlandish place, trying to find The others that you left behind sent me.

MENELAUS: What's the matter? you are not being robbe natives, I hope?

MESSENGER: Something extraordinary – but the word do describe it.

MENELAUS: Tell me. It's something strange, to judge by state you're in.

MESSENGER: All your endless hardships – all suffered nothing!

MENELAUS: That's no news to me. What has pened?

MESSENGER: Your wife has gone, vanished into the air! just went up and disappeared! Now she's out of sight, in sky, and the cave where we were guarding her is em But before she went she said this: 'You poor pitiful Tro and suffering Greeks, it was a trick of Hera's that sent yo your deaths on the banks of the Scamander. Paris did possess Helen, as you thought. Now that I have stayed as as I had to stay, I return, as Fate ordains, to the sky formed me. The curses that men heap on the unhappy H are mistaken: she has done nothing wrong.' [*He sees* HELE Oh! *there* you are, daughter of Leda! So you were here the time! I have just been reporting you as departed to regions of the stars, being unaware that you possessed wi Now I'm not letting you play tricks on us a second time: gave quite enough trouble to your husband and his fri when you were in Troy.

MENELAUS: It's true – this proves it! All she said is c firmed! Helen! [*He holds out his arms and* HELEN *runs to h*

ey embrace.] How I have longed for this day, longed to take
ou in my arms! Now you are mine!

EN: O dearest love! year after endless year
Crept by: now joy has come, for you are here!
Women, I laugh for joy:
My husband is mine once more,
And my arms are round his neck.
He comes like a flare of flame
Lighting my dark despair.

NELAUS:
nd you are mine. So much, since then, has passed –
Vhat should I tell – what ask you – first or last?

EN: My hair wings wild in the wind for joy;
My eyes are brimming, while my hands
Feel your dear form, and taste
Pleasure so long denied!

NELAUS:
o dearer sight than this! All grief forgotten!
aughter of Zeus, you are mine to have and hold.
:laimed you once, when the Heavenly Twins your brothers
ode their white horses under the torchlit night,
nd their shouts of blessing echoed, echoed again –
Once, long ago; and then
era stole you away, and my house was empty.

EN:
ow Heaven leads us on from this happy meeting
To a still happier day.

NELAUS:
od defeats ill once more; we are united.
Though joy was long on the way,
ow fortune smiles, and may blessing follow!

RUS:
essing indeed; we too pray the same prayer,
For your fate and hers are one:
You cannot suffer, and she be safe.

HELEN:

Dear friends, pain that is past has lost its sting;
My husband is mine, is mine!
He has come, and my long despair is over.

MENELAUS:

We have each other. In truth, I dimly guessed,
As the endless chain of tedious days went on,
That the Queen of Gods was at work.
There is more joy in my tears
Than all the sorrow of all the past.

HELEN:

Bliss beyond words, sweeter than heart could hope –
I hold you close to my breast.

MENELAUS:

And you to mine – you who we thought were living
In the shadow of Mount Ida,
Behind the sad battlements of Troy.
– Helen, how did you steal from home that day?

HELEN: The story you seek began in pain,
Cruel to suffer, cruel to recount again.

MENELAUS: Tell me; for every mortal must
Accept Heaven's gifts as best he may.

HELEN: The words will choke me. How can I speak?

MENELAUS: Speak, for my sake.

HELEN: I felt no guilty lust;
I did not fly over the sea to seek
The unlawful bed of an Eastern prince.

MENELAUS: What god, what fate, then, stole you away?

HELEN: Hermes the son of Zeus conveyed me here
To the banks of the Nile.

MENELAUS: At whose command?
– The son of Zeus!

HELEN: I wept long since,
And now I weep again for fear –
My enemy is the Queen of Heaven.

NELAUS: Hera! And how have *we* incurred her curse?

LEN:
he cruel reproaches I have borne
lowed from that fountain-source
Vhere the three bright immortals came to adorn
heir beauty, on which the famous judgement then was
given.

NELAUS: But why must Hera's spite be vented
On you, for judgement she resented?

LEN: To despoil Paris of the bride
The Cyprian promised him –

NELAUS: Of you!

LEN: She sent me to this desert land,
Weeping –

NELAUS: And in your place supplied
A phantom Helen – all too true!

LEN: At home there is more sorrow yet:
My mother –

NELAUS: What of her?

LEN: Is dead.
She tied the noose with her own hand,
Believing I had shamed your bed.

NELAUS: O gods! – What of Hermione?

LEN: What joy has she? What hope to get
Husband or child, when all men point to me?

NELAUS:
ris! You who have murdered my whole house,
ur deed brought death to your city and to you,
nd to ten thousand bronze-armed men of Greece.

EN:
nd I, accursed, unhappy, not untrue,
iled perforce, guiltless of broken vows,
as robbed of city, home, my husband, and my peace!

RUS: If only you meet with good luck for the future, it
ll compensate you for all that is past.

MESSENGER: Menelaus, I realize that something has m
you happy, though I have not yet fully grasped what i
Will you let me share your good news?

MENELAUS: Why, of course, you must share it, old fello

MESSENGER: Then is not this lady Helen, the prize of all
went through at Troy?

MENELAUS: This lady was never in Troy. We were tric
by the gods. The Helen we captured was a phantom to m
fools of us.

MESSENGER: What? All our sweat and blood – spent f
ghost?

MENELAUS: Yes. Hera was in a rage because of the Judgem
of Paris.

MESSENGER: Then the one who really is your wife is this
here?

MENELAUS: She is. You must take my word for it.

MESSENGER [*to* HELEN]: My daughter! The ways of the g
are involved and mysterious; they send us good and bad
tune in turn, and all is for the best. One man suffers,
soon his suffering is over and he prospers beyond his hop
another man does not suffer, but when his turn comes
luck he enjoyed so long deserts him, and he perishes mis
ably. So you and your husband had your share of sufferin
you were ill spoken of, he was caught in the storm of bat
As long as he struggled for what he wanted, he gained no
ing; now good fortune has come to him of its own acco
and he's a happy man. So, you did not disgrace your
father and your two brothers, as the world says you did.

How well I remember your wedding-day! I can see it
again now – the horses, four in a yoke, with me runn
beside them holding a torch, and you in the chariot w
Menelaus, leaving your lovely home to be married!
wipes a tear.] Excuse me. To a slave his master's affairs m
a great deal; he shares in joy and sorrow alike; if not, h
no true man. I'm a slave by birth, I know; but there

slaves who are noble, who have the mind of a free man, if not
the name: I want to count as one of them. It's the best way;
otherwise you've a double misfortune – you take orders from
everyone all round, and you *feel* like a slave as well.

MENELAUS: You're a good old man; you've borne your full
share of hardship in my service on the field; and now that
you're here to share in my good fortune, go back to the
others and tell them what has happened. Explain the present
position; warn them to wait on the shore and be ready in
case I have to make a fight for it, as I expect; and if we should
find any possible way of getting my wife out of this place,
after meeting so miraculously, they must see to it that we
aren't caught by the natives.

MESSENGER: I'll do it, my lord. And I'll tell you, this is my
experience of prophets: you can expect nothing from them
but silliness and lies. Shapes of sacrifices, cries of birds –
there's no truth in any of it, never was! Can birds do men
any good? The very notion's foolish. Calchas saw his friends
dying in battle for the sake of a phantom, yet he gave them
neither word nor sign; no more did the Trojan Helenus – his
city was sacked for nothing. You may say it was because the
god did not wish them to speak. Then why do we consult
prophets? Better ask the gods for blessing, after due offer-
ings; and leave prophets alone. Prophecy was invented to
entrap men with the promise of success; no one ever got
wealth without labour by studying sacrifices. The best oracle
is care and common sense.

CHORUS: I entirely agree with the old man about oracles. To
make friends with the gods is better than all the skill of
prophets.

Exit MESSENGER.

HELEN: So far, then, everything goes well. But tell me about
your adventures on the voyage from Troy. I gain nothing by
knowing it, but because you are dear to me I want to share
in all you have suffered.

MENELAUS: You have asked me a hundred questions in o
There were shipwrecks in the Aegean; the false beacons t
Nauplius lit on Euboea; cities in Crete and Libya we visit
the watch-tower of Perseus – why should I tell you all th
I have endured it once in reality; the distress of telling y
would make me endure it twice.

HELEN: I am sorry if I asked you things too painful to speak
Leave the rest and tell me one thing: how long have y
wandered over the ridges of the salt sea?

MENELAUS: We were at Troy ten years; since then I h
been voyaging seven summers and seven winters.

HELEN: Seven years! What a terrible, weary time! And ev
now, after finding me, you must not stay. You must
away from this country as quickly as possible. You h
escaped the war and the sea, but death waits for you her

MENELAUS: What do you mean? Death? This is bad news

HELEN: The man who owns this palace will kill you.

MENELAUS: What have I done to deserve that?

HELEN: He wants to marry me; your unexpected arrival v
put a stop to that.

MENELAUS: What? A man was proposing to marry my wi

HELEN: Yes, and to take me by force, if I had not escap
from him.

MENELAUS: How could he have the power? Is he a priv
person, or – is it the king?

HELEN: He is the king of Egypt, the son of Proteus.

MENELAUS: Oh! I see now what the old woman at the do
meant.

HELEN: What door? Have you called at some house here
Egypt?

MENELAUS: This door, the king's. I was driven away a
beggar.

HELEN: You surely were not asking for food? Oh, h
dreadful!

MENELAUS: I was in fact begging; but I didn't say so.

LEN: Then no doubt you know all about his plans for marrying me.

NELAUS: I do. What I don't know is whether you have managed to evade them.

LEN: Be reassured: your wife's chastity is untouched.

NELAUS: What deterred him? I should be most happy to believe you.

LEN: You see this tomb where you found me sitting in despair?

NELAUS: I see you have a mattress there; what was that for?

LEN: I was a suppliant there, praying to escape this marriage.

NELAUS: Was there no altar? Or do the Egyptians reverence a tomb?

LEN: This was as strong a protection as any temple.

NELAUS: Then can I not take you with me and sail for home?

LEN: You are more likely to be killed than ever to have me for your wife again.

NELAUS: Gods forbid such a cruel fate!

LEN: Now, don't be ashamed to seek your own safety, but escape!

NELAUS: And leave you here? I took Troy for your sake.

LEN: Better leave me than be killed for my sake.

NELAUS: You counsel me to be a coward – the man who took Troy!

LEN: Perhaps you think of killing the king – you could not do it.

NELAUS: Why not? Is his skin steel-proof?

LEN: You will see. It is folly to attempt the impossible.

NELAUS: Why, then, shall I meekly hold out my hands to be manacled?

LEN: You're in a trap. We must contrive some way out.

NELAUS: Certainly; I would rather be killed in action.

HELEN: There is one hope, one way of escape; and only o
MENELAUS: What shall we use? Bribes, boldness, or p
suasion?
HELEN: If the king could be prevented from knowing of y
arrival –
MENELAUS: Who will tell him? At least he won't kn
who I am.
HELEN: He has an ally in his palace whose help is worth
much as a god's.
MENELAUS: Do you mean some divine voice that speaks
side his walls?
HELEN: No, I mean his sister; they call her Theonoe.
MENELAUS: Her name is prophetic. What of her actions?
HELEN: She knows everything, and will tell her brother
are here.
MENELAUS: If she does we shall be killed; I've no way
hiding.
HELEN: If we both together appealed to her –
MENELAUS: Yes?
HELEN: Not to tell her brother about you –
MENELAUS: If she agreed, we could escape!
HELEN: Yes, easily, with her help; but no chance with
telling her.
MENELAUS: *You* must persuade her; she will listen t
woman.
HELEN: At least she will let me approach her as a supplian
MENELAUS: Well; what if she rejects our appeal?
HELEN: You will be killed, and I shall be forced into marria
MENELAUS: To consent would prove you false. He could
force you – that is an excuse.
HELEN: I swear solemnly by your life –
MENELAUS: You swear – to die, rather than to belong
another man.
HELEN: By the same sword that kills you. I will lie at y
side.

NELAUS: To seal that promise, take my hand.

LEN [*taking his hand*]: I swear, if you die, to die too.

NELAUS: And I swear that if I lose you I will take my own ife.

LEN: How shall we die so that our death brings us fame and nonour?

NELAUS: Here on this tomb. I will kill you, and afterwards myself. But first I will put up a mighty struggle to win you. Let them all come! I shall not disgrace the name I won at Troy; nor am I going back to Greece to be blackguarded as he man who robbed Thetis of Achilles, saw Ajax fall on his sword, and led Nestor's son to his death, but was not ready o die himself for his own wife's sake. I am ready, with all ny heart. If the gods have understanding, the earth of burial ies lightly on a brave man killed by his enemies; but to a coward his grave is a crushing rock.

ORUS: O gods, let the house of Tantalus find good fortune t last, and be delivered from all their troubles!

Voices are heard in the palace, and the name of 'Theonoe', and the sound of heavy bolts being moved.

LEN: Oh! Gods have pity! What cruel fortune! Menelaus, we are caught. Here comes the priestess Theonoe. I hear hem unbolting the door. You must fly! – yet, what is the se? She knows you're here whether she sees you or not. O Menelaus! this is my fate! You escaped the cruelty of Troy only to meet other cruel swords here.

Enter THEONOE.

EONOE: Hold the lamp bright before me and lead on. Sanctify every corner of the air with pure ritual, that I may draw holy breath from heaven. If any man has polluted this place with unhallowed tread, purge my path with flame; wave the torch before me, that I may pass. Your sacred service done, carry back the fire to the central hearth.

Helen, I have news for you, divinely revealed. Your husband Menelaus has come: there he stands before you! He

has lost both his ships and the phantom of yourself. Unhap
Menelaus! What sufferings, what escapes you have know
This was not, after all, your homeward voyage; not, at lea
if you loiter here. For among the gods this day there is co
ference and dispute about you in the court of Zeus. He
who once hated you, is now your friend; she wishes
bring you both safely to your home, so that all Hellas m
know Paris was deceived in the wife whom Aphrodite ga
him. But Aphrodite hopes to frustrate your return, lest s
be known to have bargained with Helen's beauty for
unlawful love, and men condemn her. Thus, in the event,
lies in my power either to destroy you, as Aphrodite desir
by telling my brother of your arrival, or to take Hera's p
and save your life by deceiving my brother, who has order
me to inform him immediately upon your appearance he

I will safeguard my own position. Go, one of you, and t
my brother that Menelaus has come.

HELEN: Maiden, I fall a suppliant at your feet, beseeching y
in misery and humility for myself and for Menelaus. Aft
many years I have found him: yet in this moment I must s
him die. Now that my beloved husband has come, and I ho
him in my arms, do not betray him to your brother, b
spare him, I entreat you. Do not purchase the favour
tyranny, the gratitude of a wicked heart, by shaming yo
own piety. God hates violence, and bids us possess what v
possess without robbery. What can only come by crime v
must not touch. As the sky is a common grace to all ma
kind, so is the earth, where each may fill his house wi
goods but must not hold what is another's, nor take it
force. My coming here was timely, but has turned to miser
Hermes gave me to your father to keep safe for my husban
now my husband is here and wants to receive what is hi
How can he, if they kill him? How can the king pay his ju
debt by bestowing the living on the dead? That debt w
contracted between the god and your father, and it is the

ntegrity, their wishes, that you must consider. Would they ot have what belongs to another duly returned? You should ot feel more bound to your impious brother than to your oble father. You are a seer, and believe in divine providnce: if now you pervert your father's purpose, and take our unjust brother's part, is it not shameful that you who now the secrets of Heaven both now and to come, should ot know right from wrong? Look at my husband and me, ersecuted by misery and misfortune; pity us and save us. Ise your power for this better purpose. I am Helen, hated y the whole world, infamous throughout Hellas as the wife vho betrayed her husband for the sake of a wealthy home in Phrygia. But if I return to Hellas and live again in Sparta, if heir own ears and eyes prove to them that they were cruelly ricked by the goddess, and that I did not betray my husband, hen they will give me back my good name; I shall see my laughter married, whom no man will take now; this hateful, omeless life that I live here will end, and I shall enjoy the omfort and splendour of my own home. If Menelaus had lied across the sea, I should be weeping at the news, without ven being able to see him; but he is alive, and here: must e be taken from me?

No, no, Theonoe! I implore you, be like your noble ather, and grant what I ask. A good man's daughter can have o higher praise, than that her goodness equals his.

ORUS: Your pleading words, Helen – and still more you ourself – move my pity. But Menelaus has yet to speak for is life: I long to hear what he will say.

NELAUS: You need not expect me to fall at your feet in ears; such weakness now would make Troy blush for her onqueror. Certainly weeping is held no disgrace to a king vhen Fate is hard; though even if tears be a credit, I prefer ourage.

If you intend to help, as in duty bound, a man who rightully asks to receive back his own wife, give her to me, and

further, ensure my escape. If not, I am already familiar v
misfortune; and your reward will be infamy. But I will m
my appeal for that just treatment which I claim to dese
my appeal for the sympathy of your inmost heart, as a s
pliant here before the tomb of your father. [MENELA
moves to the tomb.]

Aged Proteus, guardian spirit of this marble tomb!
store to me my wife, whom Zeus sent here to you in t
for me. Death, I know, forbids that I should receive
from your own hands; but surely your daughter will
allow that men should call you from the dead to curse y
once noble name. We are in her hands. [*He turns from
tomb and addresses the earth.*]

Lord of the lower world, you too I call upon for he
You have received countless bodies of men that fell by
sword: you have your payment. Either restore now th
dead to life, or bid Theonoe prove herself more righte
than this impious king, by giving me my wife. [*He turn*
THEONOE *again.*]

But if you and the king steal my wife from me – I will
you now what she has left unsaid. You must know, Theon
that I have bound myself by solemn oaths, first, to eng
your brother in combat, till one of us kills the other: tha
final. But if he will not meet me sword to sword, but
sieges us with hunger here in our sanctuary, then I
resolved, first to kill Helen, afterwards to drive this tw
edged sword into my own heart, here upon the slab of t
monument, that our blood may stream down upon Prote
grave; we shall lie both dead together upon this polish
stone, to wring your heart and soil your father's name
ever. Neither your brother nor any other man shall ha
Helen: I shall take her myself, to my own home, if possibl
if not, to the dead. [*His voice breaks, and he brushes a tear.*]

What is this – *tears*? Because my eyes are womanish y
perhaps think me readier to sue than to do. Kill me, if th

is your mind: the crime will brand you. But make the better choice; do what is just and right: let me have my wife.

HORUS: You must judge, Theonoe, what each has said; make a decision that will satisfy everyone.

THEONOE: Both nature and inclination prompt me to piety. I love myself; I am anxious not to cloud my father's good name; while to my brother I must refuse any service that would turn to his dishonour. There is in my soul a great temple of righteousness, a gift that I have from my father Nereus. So I will try to save Menelaus; and since Hera wishes to help him, I will cast my vote with hers. For Aphrodite – may she forgive me; but I have had no dealings with her in the past, and I will grow old a virgin as I am now. Your appeal to my father to vindicate his honour is one which I myself echo. To refuse to deliver you your wife would be to wrong him; for if he were living he would certainly restore you to each other. Right and wrong are rewarded in every country on earth, and not less among the dead. The mind of one departed may not have life; but it has become one with immortal spirit, and therefore has immortal understanding.

So, to be brief, I will, as you have asked, keep silence, and be no accomplice to my brother's wickedness. Indeed, what I do is a true service to him, turning his impious intent to righteousness.

Now I will leave you to yourselves and say nothing; you must discover some way of escape. Let your first thought be of the gods: pray that Aphrodite may allow you a safe voyage home; and that Hera, who now intends the welfare of you both, may not change her mind.

She turns to the tomb.

Father, I make this promise to your departed soul: no deed of mine shall ever profane your pious memory.

Exit.

CHORUS: Wickedness never prospers; but goodness may h for its reward.

HELEN: Menelaus, as far as she is concerned we are safe. the rest – make some suggestion; together we must plot escape.

MENELAUS: Listen then: you have lived in the palace a l time; you are intimate with the servants?

HELEN: Why do you ask? Yes, there might be a hope the Tell me your plan.

MENELAUS: Could you persuade one of the stable-men to us a four-horse chariot?

HELEN: I could; but how should we escape by land – o these endless plains, and with Egyptians all round us?

MENELAUS: No, it's impossible. Well, what if I hid in t palace – I have my sword – and killed the king?

HELEN: Theonoe would never allow her brother to be kille she would warn him.

MENELAUS: Even if we reach the shore, there is no ship escape in; mine is at the bottom of the sea.

HELEN: Listen, Menelaus – a woman's plan might succee will you let me invent a story that you are dead?

MENELAUS: It may invite ill-luck; but if there's somethi solid to be gained, I'm willing to die – in fiction.

HELEN: Good; then I will appear before this pagan king mourning for you, and weeping –

MENELAUS: How will that help our escape? This plan yours seems a bit old-fashioned.

HELEN: I will tell him you were drowned at sea, and ask h permission to make a cenotaph for you.

MENELAUS: Suppose he agrees; giving me a cenotaph won save our lives without a ship.

HELEN: I will ask him to provide us a ship, from which w may drop your burial-offerings into the lap of the sea.

MENELAUS: It's a good plan, except for this: if he tells you t perform the rites on land your story will be no use.

HELEN: But I'll tell him it's against Greek custom to bury on land those drowned at sea.

MENELAUS: Yes, that will do; then I'll go on board with you to help in the ritual.

HELEN: Yes, you, of course, chiefly; and all your sailors too who survived the wreck.

MENELAUS: Once I get hold of a ship at anchor, my men will be there, armed and disciplined.

HELEN: You must see to that; I only pray for favouring winds and a fair voyage.

MENELAUS: We shall have them; the gods are going to be kind! – By the way, who will you say told you I was dead?

HELEN: You. Say that you are the sole survivor of Menelaus's crew, and that you saw him drown.

MENELAUS: Yes! And this strip of sail I've tied round me will confirm your story of the wreck.

HELEN: It was luckily found, though you at that moment were almost lost. You're a pitiful sight; and that is going to save us.

MENELAUS: Had I better come indoors with you, or shall I sit quietly here by the tomb?

HELEN: Stay here; if he tries violence with you, the tomb gives you sanctuary – and you have your sword. I will go in now, change this white dress for mourning black, cut my hair short and tear my face with my nails till the blood runs. [MENELAUS *begins to protest.*] I must indeed; everything is at stake – my safe home-coming and your life. There is no third way; if we fail, if the king discovers my deception, I must die.

We pray to you, Queen Hera, who lie in the bed of Zeus, stretching our hands towards heaven, where you live in the star-embroidered heights: have pity upon us both and deliver us!

We pray to you, child of Dione, Aphrodite, for whom the prize of beauty was won by the promise of my hand: do not destroy me! Did I not suffer enough before, when you gave

my name to dishonour among my own people? Will you n
give my body to death in a foreign land? If you wish for
death, let me die in the city of my fathers. Why are y
never sated with mortal suffering?

You traffic in lust and falsehood, crooked intrigue a
secret drugs are your instruments of death. Were there b
measure in your power, no other gives gifts so sweet
yours. That is all I can say.

HELEN *goes into the palace;* MENELAUS *remains.*

CHORUS:

Shy nightingale, mistress of woodland music, [*Strophe*
Rapt votress, sweetening with each anguished note
The green leaf-curtained chambers of the forest,
Come to my call, and share my sorrow's burden
With shrill grief rippling from your russet throat.

Sharp was the pain of Hellas, hot the tears
Troy's people shed, cursing the Hellene spears,
Since Trojan oars raced the rough Malean water,
And Paris, doomed in love, brought home from Sparta,
With mocking Aphrodite as his guide,
The phantom Helen for his fatal bride.

The sword played and the slung stone flew; [*Antistrophe*
and breath
Failed, and ten thousand Hellenes dwell with death,
Leaving heart-broken wives to mourn shorn-headed
In empty chambers. The lone sailor Nauplius
Lit his false fire on the Capherian Cape –
A star turned liar, that lured ten thousand more
To ram the sunk rocks like fierce jaws agape;
And watched men die amidst the Aegean's roar.

Menelaus, racing storm-swept leagues from Sparta
Past Malea's bare cliff to this foreign water,

Clutched the sham prize of many a gory blade –
The phantom Helen, that mocking Hera made.

You who in earnest ignorance [*Strophe* 2
Would check the deeds of lawless men,
And in the clash of spear on spear
Gain honour – you are all stark mad!
If men, to settle each dispute,
Must needs compete in bloodshed, when
Shall violence vanish, hate be soothed,
Or men and cities live in peace?

Why have the sons of Priam
Received each his portion in chambers of quiet earth,
When reasonable words could have solved the quarrel for Helen?
Now they lie deep in the lap of Death;
And flames leaping like Zeus's thunderbolt
Have levelled their walls with dust;
Helen, your heart bears grief on grief;
And brave Menelaus wrings tears from every eye.

You who with learned patience plod [*Antistrophe* 2
Remotest realms of toilsome thought,
Can you by searching find out God,
Or bound his nature? Look at man!
From want to wealth, now forth, now back,
Now tossed from fame to infamy
By unforeseen, ambiguous chance!

Zeus was your father, Helen:
Winged like a swan he swooped to plant you in Leda's womb;
Yet, your name was shouted with execration
Through cities of Hellas, East to West:
Breaker of man's law and God's, breaker of faith!

So now I cannot tell
What mortal utterance may be called sure;
But truth is found in the mouth of God.

Enter THEOCLYMENUS *from hunting, with attendants. He c*
not at first see MENELAUS, *but turns to pay respect to the tor*

THEOCLYMENUS: Proteus, my father, I salute your mor
ment, which I placed here that I might greet you at
doorway. Always, going or coming, your son Theoclymer
thus pays you worship.

Men, take the hounds and all your hunting gear into t
palace.

Attendants go in; THEOCLYMENUS *turns to the* CHORUS.

I've just been calling myself a fool. The trouble is, I do
punish slackness in servants with death. And now I disco
that some Greek has landed here in broad daylight, a
slipped past my scouts; come to reconnoitre for Helen,
even hoping to steal her away. Well, if we only catch hi
he shall die.

He notices HELEN'S *absence.*

Why! By the gods, I'm too late; he seems to have do
it. There's no one here. Helen's gone – she has been carri
off, taken out of the country! Ho, there, open the doo
The woman I mean to marry shall not get clear of our sho
if I can prevent it.

The doors open revealing HELEN; *she is dressed in mourning.*

Wait, wait! I see what I was looking for. She is here in t
palace. She has not escaped.

Why, Helen! You have changed your white dress f
mourning black; you have laid the shears to your pro
head, and mown off your hair; your cheek is wet; you a
weeping! Why is this? Is it some vivid dream that has ma
you sad? Or some rumour you have heard from Hellas, th
has so changed your looks?

HELEN: My lord – now I may indeed call you 'my lord' – I a
in deep distress; all my hopes are lost; my life is over.

HEOCLYMENUS: But what is your trouble? What has happened?

ELEN: Menelaus – oh, how can I say it? – Menelaus is dead.

HEOCLYMENUS: Then I do not grudge you your tears, if my good fortune is so great. But how do you know? Did you hear this from Theonoe?

ELEN: Yes, from her; and from a man who witnessed his death.

HEOCLYMENUS: What? Has someone come who can vouch for this?

ELEN: Yes, he has come; and may he go where I would have him go!

HEOCLYMENUS: Who is he? Where is he? I want to hear more details.

ELEN: There he sits, crouching by the tomb.

HEOCLYMENUS: By Apollo, what a sight! The man's in rags.

ELEN [*weeping*]: Oh! My poor husband suffered as he does!

HEOCLYMENUS: What is his country? Where was he sailing from?

ELEN: He is a Greek; one of those who were sailing with Menelaus.

HEOCLYMENUS: How does he say Menelaus died?

ELEN: The most piteous of deaths: drowned in the salt sea.

HEOCLYMENUS: Where was he sailing at the time?

ELEN: He was wrecked on the steep rocks of the Libyan coast.

HEOCLYMENUS: If this man was on the same ship, how did he escape?

ELEN: A slave is sometimes luckier than a king.

HEOCLYMENUS: Where has he left his wrecked ship?

ELEN: At the bottom of the sea – my curse on it! If only Menelaus had escaped!

HEOCLYMENUS [*with a satisfaction he cannot resist*]: But Menelaus was drowned. What vessel brought this man here?

HELEN: Sailors found him and picked him up, so he says.

THEOCLYMENUS: And what of the phantom that was sent your place to curse Troy?

HELEN: It has vanished into air.

THEOCLYMENUS: Then Priam and his people perished nothing.

HELEN: And I was involved in their disaster – for nothing.

THEOCLYMENUS: Did he leave your husband's body buried, or –

HELEN: Yes, unburied, unburied. [*She weeps.*]

THEOCLYMENUS: So this is why you have cut your gold locks.

HELEN: I loved him long ago when he was with me; I lo him still.

THEOCLYMENUS: It is true, then? This is really what you weeping for?

HELEN: Would it be easy for me to deceive your sister?

THEOCLYMENUS: It would not. Well: are you going remain clinging to this tomb?

HELEN: I shrink from you – out of loyalty to my husband.

THEOCLYMENUS: Why tantalize me? Must you still remember him?

HELEN: I will not any more. Now you may begin prepari for our marriage.

THEOCLYMENUS: Your consent has been long in comin but it makes me happy.

HELEN: You know what must be done. Let us forget the pa

THEOCLYMENUS: I must be gracious in return. What sh I do?

HELEN: Let us call a truce, and be friends.

THEOCLYMENUS: All my anger – I renounce it, fling it to t winds.

HELEN: Then, since you are my friend, I fall at your feet a beg you, I cling to you as a suppliant –

THEOCLYMENUS: What do you desire?

ELEN: I want to bury my husband who has died.

IEOCLYMENUS: Bury him? What, a grave without a body? Do you want to bury his ghost?

ELEN: It is the custom in Hellas, when a man is lost at sea, to prepare an empty winding-sheet and perform the rites of burial.

IEOCLYMENUS: True, the sons of Pelops are skilled in these matters. Perform what is due; build a tomb for him anywhere you wish.

ELEN: We do not build tombs for men who go down with their ships.

IEOCLYMENUS: What, then? I know nothing of your customs.

ELEN: We lower into the sea the gifts that are due to the dead.

IEOCLYMENUS: What would you like me to provide for him?

ELEN: This man knows. I have no experience – such a loss is new to me.

IEOCLYMENUS [*to* MENELAUS]: Fellow, you have brought me happy news.

ENELAUS: Not happy for me; nor for the dead.

IEOCLYMENUS: How do you bury those who are drowned at sea?

ENELAUS: It varies according to the dead man's means.

IEOCLYMENUS: I will spare no expense, for Helen's sake. Tell me everything that should be done.

ENELAUS: First, an offering of blood to the powers of the earth.

IEOCLYMENUS: What beast should we offer? I will do as you say.

ENELAUS: You yourself must decide; whatever you give will be suitable.

IEOCLYMENUS: Our custom here is to kill a horse or a bull.

MENELAUS: But see that the beast you offer is with
blemish.

THEOCLYMENUS: My herds are large; we have perfect bea
in plenty.

MENELAUS: Next we bring rugs and coverlets, as it were fo
bed.

THEOCLYMENUS: You shall have them. What else?

MENELAUS: Armour and weapons of bronze: he was a soldi

THEOCLYMENUS: The arms I give you shall be fit for a son
Pelops.

MENELAUS: And last, an offering of fine fruit, of every s
your soil produces.

THEOCLYMENUS: Good. Then how do you lower these gi
into the sea?

MENELAUS: There must be a ship manned with rowers.

THEOCLYMENUS: And how far must the ship go from sho

MENELAUS: Till her white wake is hardly visible.

THEOCLYMENUS: But why? What do you achieve with t
observance?

MENELAUS: That the tide may not cast up our offerings ag
on land.

THEOCLYMENUS: You shall have a Phoenician barque, whi
will prove swift enough.

MENELAUS: That is well; you are generous to Menelaus.

THEOCLYMENUS: Cannot you perform these rites alo
without Helen?

MENELAUS: The dead must be buried by mother, or wife,
child.

THEOCLYMENUS: You mean, this observance is Helen's du

MENELAUS: Those who fear God do not scant the service
the dead.

THEOCLYMENUS: Let her go; I would wish my wife to b
god-fearing woman. Go indoors, choose what gifts you ne
make all arrangements; and if Helen is pleased with yo
work, I shall not send you away empty-handed. Pitia

igure as you are, you have brought me welcome news; then
ou shall have clothes for your nakedness, and food, and a
appy return to your own country. And you, Helen – do not
ear yourself out with useless weeping. I am sorry for you;
ut Menelaus has met his fate, and the dead cannot come
ack to life.

ENELAUS: It is your duty to obey, my lady. You must
ccept the husband who stands before you, and forget the
ne whose claim is ended. In your present position this will
e best for you. And if I come safely home to Hellas, I will
ut an end to evil tales about you; only be the wife you
hould be to your husband.

LEN: I will; and you shall be there to witness that my hus-
and will have no cause to blame me.

But now go indoors and have a bath, poor man, and change
our clothes. I will give you your reward at once; after all,
ou are more likely to show real devotion in performing
vhat is due to my beloved Menelaus, if you have found me
roperly grateful.

Exeunt into the palace THEOCLYMENUS *and* HELEN,
followed by Guards escorting MENELAUS.

ORUS:

here was a time, they say, when the Great [*Strophe* 1
Mother
an to and fro frantic over the mountains,
hrough green glades of the forest,
canning the swirl of every river,
couring the deep-voiced swell of the salt ocean,
earching in anguish for her lost Persephone,
Maiden of mysteries.

hen with a shrill shout
ang out the ecstatic cymbals,
he Phrygian lions were yoked,
nd in her gorgeous chariot the goddess rode

To seek Persephone, stolen from the dancing ring of girl
Beside her swept like whirlwinds the virgin goddesses,
Artemis armed with invincible arrows,
Athene with spear and Gorgon shield.
But Zeus from the throne of heaven saw their purpose,
And the will of Zeus went a different way.

Now when, weary and bewildered, the Great Mother [*Antistroph*
Ceased her swift searching over the mountains,
In despair for her stolen daughter
She climbed the dazzling snow-bound summits
Sacred to nymphs of Ida; and at her command
The swollen torrents that leap down the mountain gorge
Were swallowed in the sink of the sea.

And cattle starved on the brown plains;
The sapless earth could bear no fruit;
The child died in the womb;
No lusty bud or curling tendril-spray
Burst from the vine; and on cities a deathly silence fell;
No pious thanksgiving thronged the temples,
No altar flamed with holy oil;
Even the shining springs the goddess forbade to flow,
In frenzy of grief for her lost child.

So when the Phrygian Mother had compelled [*Stroph*
Mortals and gods to cease from banqueting,
To soothe her, Zeus the King
Spoke to the Graces, those dread deities:
'Go to the goddess of Earth, who is angry still
For her stolen virgin child;
Charm her resentful heart with melodies,
And let the Muses lend their skill,
Dancing and singing.' First of the immortals came
Glorious Aphrodite, and she held

High the bronze cymbals, voiced like subterranean flame,
And the leathern tabors rattling wild.
And the goddess-mother smiled,
And her hands received the flute of sonorous tone
Which filled her heart with music like its own.

But the maid had sinned, in childish innocence [*Antistrophe* 2
Breaking her fast in the dark rooms of earth.
The Mother of all birth
Saw her law slighted, and her anger rose.

A fearful power fills the bright dappled folds
Of a fawnskin cloak, fills the young ivy-shoot
Wreathed round a sacred fennel-wand;
Godhead itself is seen
In flash of an ecstatic hand that holds
High in the wind the whirling tambourine;
The toss of loose hair live with Bacchus' power;
Rapt vigil in the holy midnight hour.
And this dread deity who goes
Blazoned with glory on every hand –
She pardons none who taste the forbidden fruit.

HELEN *enters from the palace.*

HELEN: My dears, all goes well for us in the palace. The King questioned Theonoe; but she is on our side and told him nothing about my husband's arrival. Out of pure kindness to me she told him that Menelaus was dead. As for the equipment my husband needs, it was his own master-stroke that procured it. He asked for bronze weapons to throw into the sea: now he's bringing them himself, with his left hand firm on the grip of the shield, and his right holding the spear, – all this by way of partaking in the ceremonies due to the dead. So he's ready armed for the fight; and once we're on board and under way, he'll settle accounts with any number of Egyptians. I have provided him with clothes instead of

those rags from the wreck, and at last, after all these ye
he has had a proper bath in fresh water. – I must be sile
here comes the man who thinks that marriage with me i
his grasp. I beg of you, be my friends; guard your tongues
may be, if we escape, some day we could help you to esc
too.

Enter THEOCLYMENUS, *attended.*

THEOCLYMENUS: Now, men, take these gifts consecrated
the sea, and pass on in due order, following this man's
structions. Helen: if I may suggest it, take my advice
stay here. You will honour your husband equally whet
present at the ceremony or not. I am afraid some frenzy
grief or devotion may drive you to throw yourself into
sea. You are giving way to sorrow too much; especially si
his body is not even here.

HELEN: My husband – to be, duty insists that I honour
first husband, and the memory of our marriage; and for l
of him I would even die with him. But what pleasure co
it give him, that I should share his death? No; let me
myself, and give my gifts to the dead; and may the g
grant to you everything that I wish; and to this man too,
his help in what I am doing. You shall find in me such a w
as your goodness to us both deserves; for all this leads t
happy end. Now, complete your generosity by command
a ship to be given us, to carry these gifts.

THEOCLYMENUS [*to an attendant*]: Go; give them a fif
oared Sidonian ship fully manned.

HELEN: As this man is arranging the burial, had he not bet
command the ship?

THEOCLYMENUS: Certainly; my men must take his orde

HELEN: Repeat that command, to make sure your men und
stand you.

THEOCLYMENUS [*to the attendants*]: I repeat it: you take
orders. [*To* HELEN.] I will say it a third time, if you wis

HELEN: Blessings on you – and on my undertaking.

EOCLYMENUS: Now, you must not spoil your beauty with oo many tears.

LEN: To-day will show how grateful I am to you.

EOCLYMENUS: This is wasted labour: the dead are othing.

LEN: I remember both the dead and the living.

EOCLYMENUS: You will find in me as good a husband as Menelaus.

LEN: You have been wonderful. All I pray for is good ortune.

EOCLYMENUS: That lies with you. Only give me your eart.

LEN: My heart knows now where its love belongs.

EOCLYMENUS: Would you like my help? Shall I escort ou myself?

LEN: By no means; my lord must not serve his own servants.

EOCLYMENUS: Away, then; your Greek ritual is nothing o me. My house is clean – it was not here that Menelaus lied. Go, someone, tell my nobles to bring their wedding-ifts to the palace. Let the land ring aloud with music and ongs of blessing, to celebrate the joy of my marriage with Helen.

[*To* MENELAUS.] You, stranger, go and deliver these ifts into the arms of the sea, to honour him who was once ner husband. When you have done it, bring my wife back with all speed to my palace. Then you shall share my table t our wedding-feast; and afterwards either sail for Hellas or live happily here.

Exit THEOCLYMENUS *to the palace.*

ENELAUS: O Zeus, named the Father of men, the compassionate, look upon us in our peril and save us. As we drag our hopeful fortunes up the steep hill, stretch out your hand and help us. One touch of your finger, and we shall reach the deliverance we long for. Are my past sufferings not enough

for me to bear? Gods, I have blamed you foolishly, a
repent. I have not deserved perpetual misery; now my
should be straight. You have shown me one favour: grant
now a lasting joy.

MENELAUS, HELEN *and attendants move off towards the shore.*

CHORUS:

Oars of the East, [*Strop*
Winged Sidonian galley,
Flash through the foam-spray!
Darling of Nereus, dance,
While the dancing dolphins follow!
Now in the soft season,
The sea smoothed with the wind's caress,
When the voice of Calm, the grey-blue daughter of Ocea
Quietly sings,
Now spread sails to the breeze,
Good-bye to the sheltering port,
Grip and pull on the pinewood sweep,
Crew of Menelaus, and carry in triumph
Helen to the harbours of home and the city that Pers
built.

What will she see? [*Antistroph*
Perhaps the daughters of Leucippus
By the rough Eurotas
Or before the temple of Pallas,
If she comes at the season of dances,
Or on the enchanted night
When the Spartans revel for Hyacinthus,
Whom Apollo killed by chance with his discus-rim
In the game of throws;
For whose sake the son of Zeus
Appointed a holy day,
Slaughter of bulls and banqueting.

Perhaps she will see in the dancing ring
The child she left, long ago, at home –
Hermione, waiting still for the bridal torches' flame.

O for wings to tread the air [*Strophe* 2
Where the cranes in ordered flight
Shun the wintry rain-storm,
Seek their southern homeland;
Swift, obedient to their eldest leader's cry
Rising shrill, triumphant,
As they near the frontiers
Of this land, where rainless valleys teem with corn.

Turn, you long-necked travellers,
Who run winged races with the dancing clouds,
And while the Pleiads still are in mid-course
And Orion rides the darkened sky, swoop down,
Alight on Eurotas and proclaim your news
That the taker of Troy, Menelaus, is coming home.

Speed along your airy path, [*Antistrophe* 2
Riding sons of Tyndareus,
You whose home is heaven
And the stars' bright orbits!
Helen's brothers, Helen's rescuers, ride on,
Skim the green and foam-white ridges
On the dark face of the ocean,
Bring soft breath of welcome winds, the gift of Zeus.

Cleanse your sister's fame,
Slandered as paramour of a foreign prince.
Dearly she paid for that hot feud begun
When on Mount Ida goddesses came to trial;
Though never did Helen sail to the land of Troy
Or see the towers that Apollo built.

Enter THEOCLYMENUS, *unannounced, from the palace; before* *can speak, the* MESSENGER, *one of the attendants sent* THEOCLYMENUS *to accompany the procession, arrives from* *shore.*

MESSENGER: My lord! We know you were never one to h bour suspicion; and now listen to the terrible news I have tell.

THEOCLYMENUS: What has happened?

MESSENGER: You must begin looking for another bri Helen has gone – fled the country.

THEOCLYMENUS: Gone! Has she escaped on foot or tak wings?

MESSENGER: Menelaus has sailed clean away with her. was Menelaus who came and told you the tale of his o death.

THEOCLYMENUS: Terrible news indeed; it is incredibl How could they get away by sea?

MESSENGER: In the ship you gave to that Greek. Briefly, cleared your crew out, and sailed off with your ship.

THEOCLYMENUS: How? I want to know how! Was I to su pose he could overpower a whole crew single-handed? Y were one of them!

MESSENGER: I will tell you all that took place after we l the palace. As soon as the daughter of Zeus reached t shore, with gestures and cries she made an accomplish pretence of mourning for her husband – who, so far fro being dead, was there at her side. We entered the roy dock, and launched a Sidonian ship of the first line, with full complement of fifty rowers. Everything was done order: one man was setting the mast, another placing t oars, others knitting the line of them in a clean row, furli the white sails, dropping the rudders into position by t cords.

While we were busy, some Greek sailors, who had co with Menelaus and must have been watching for the rig

moment, came towards us on the shore. They were fine-looking men, but wild and unkempt and dressed in rags like castaways. As soon as Menelaus saw them, with a fine show of grief in his voice and face he spoke to them. 'O you unlucky Greeks, what was your ship? How were you wrecked? We are going to pay funeral honours to Menelaus, son of Atreus; his body is lost, but this lady, his wife Helen, will perform the ceremonies. Will you come and join us?' So they, with pretended tears, and solemnly bringing their own sea-offerings, came on board. To us that seemed suspicious; and some of us remarked that they were too many for the ship. However, we kept your instructions and held our tongues; it was putting that Greek in command that caused the whole disaster.

Now most of the gear, being light, we hoisted on board easily enough; but the bull for sacrifice stuck in his heels and refused to set foot on the gangway. He bellowed, rolled his eyes, humped his back, looked down his horn and would not let anyone touch him. Then Helen's husband shouted, 'Come on, you sackers of Troy, pick up that bull Greek-fashion! Get your shoulders under him and heave him on board; we'll offer him to the dead!' At the same time he drew his sword and held it high. The men came at his command, picked up the bull, carried him and set him down on deck. With the horse there was no trouble; Menelaus stroked his neck and forehead, and coaxed him on board.

At last, when everything was stowed, Helen set her lovely foot on the ship's ladder, and there she was, sitting near the stern, and Menelaus – the dead man – at her side. The rest of the Greeks were sitting along the gunwale, left and right, man for man, each with a sword hidden in his clothes; and the hull was full of our voices as we shouted the rowing-song.

When we were some way from shore – not too far, but well out – the helmsman called to Menelaus, 'Tell us, are we

to sail on further? You are in command: will this d
Menelaus replied, 'Far enough.' Then he made his w
sword in hand, to the prow. And as he stood there
slaughter the bull, and as he cut its throat, instead of utter
any dead man's name, he prayed, 'Poseidon, Lord of the s
and you divine Nereids, bring my wife and me safe to
shores of Nauplia, home to a free land!' The blood stream
out in a long jet and fell into the sea – a good omen
the Greek. One of our men said, 'There's treachery afo
let's get back to shore. Make them pull on the right;
the helm over.' Menelaus left the bull dead and sto
and shouted to his men, 'Now is the time! Make Hel
proud of you! Cut these Egyptians to pieces and throw th
into the sea!' And our captain in reply shouted to y
crew, 'Up, men, they are enemies! Get spars for weapo
smash benches, tear out rowlocks; at them and break th
heads!'

Every man leapt to his feet. We had poles, they h
swords; the ship was a welter of blood. We heard a voi
from the stern cheering them on – it was Helen: 'Show th
Egyptians the way you fought at Troy!' she cried, and h
eager voice whetted their spirits for the battle. Your m
were falling, struggling to their feet again; some you co
see lying still and dead. Menelaus, in full armour, wherev
he saw his friends worsted, went to their help; his swo
flashed among his enemies, and their bodies flew hurtli
overboard, till he had cleared every one of your rowers fr
the ship. Then he went over to the steersman and told hi
to make course for Hellas. The Greeks hoisted sail, and t
wind was in their favour.

So they have gone. I escaped being killed and lowered m
self into the sea by the anchor. I was nearly exhausted wh
a fisherman picked me up and put me ashore to bring y
the news. – Well, there is one thing every man has to lear
it is, not to be too trustful.

ORUS: My lord, I could never have believed that Menelaus ould come here, as he did, in person, without being recog- ized either by yourself or us.

EOCLYMENUS: Oh! to be so miserably outwitted by a voman! That my chosen wife should slip from my hands! If here were any hope of overtaking them by ship, I would pare no effort to lay hands on them. As things are – it was ny sister who betrayed me: she saw Menelaus in the palace nd said nothing to me; then I will be revenged on her. She sed her prophetic power to cheat me: it shall be the last ime!

le turns to enter the palace; but the MESSENGER *has stepped between him and the palace door.*

SSENGER: Now, my lord, where are you going? Do you iean to commit murder?

EOCLYMENUS: Get out of my way. I am going to commit istice.

SSENGER: It would be a terrible crime. I will not let you o.

EOCLYMENUS: Am I to take orders from a slave?

SSENGER: Yes, because I am right!

EOCLYMENUS: You are doing me wrong, unless you let ie go –

SSENGER: I will not!

EOCLYMENUS: My sister deserves death; she is a traitress.

SSENGER: No, she is a woman who fears the gods; it was st and right to deceive you.

EOCLYMENUS: She gave my wife to another man.

SSENGER: She was his by right; her father gave her to enelaus.

EOCLYMENUS: Fortune gave her to me. Menelaus had no ght to what was mine.

SSENGER: Fate took her from you: it was to be.

EOCLYMENUS: I can judge my own affairs.

SSENGER: But I am a better judge than you.

THEOCLYMENUS: Who is king, you or I?
MESSENGER: It is for the king to do right, not wrong.
THEOCLYMENUS: You are in love with death, I think.
MESSENGER: Kill me! But you shall not kill your sister
can prevent it. The noblest thing a slave can do is to die
his master.

The DIOSCORI *suddenly appear above the palace door.*

DIOSCORI:

Control your sinful fury, Theoclymenus, King of Egypt!
We are the sons of Zeus and Leda, the Dioscori,
Brothers of this same Helen who has escaped from y
palace.
Despite your rage, know that this marriage was not for y
Theonoe your sister, the Nereid's daughter, did
wrong you,
But honoured the will of Heaven and your father's just cc
mand.
Destiny ordained that Helen until this present day
Should live here in your palace; but now that Troy's str
walls
Are breached and blackened, no divine end is further ser
By Helen's borrowed name; it is right that she once mo
Be joined with her true husband and live in her own hor
Then sheathe that murderous sword drawn for your siste
blood;
Confess her wisdom. We, now raised by Zeus to godhea
Would long ago have contrived to rescue her from your la
But bowed to Fate, and the divine purpose thus fulfilled

So much for you, Theoclymenus; next I speak to Helen
Sail on with your true husband; fair winds shall speed y
and we
Your brothers, riding the waves, will escort you sa
home.
And when your course is run, and your mortal term fulfill

You shall rise divine, and with us receive from the race of men
Worship and holy feasts; for such is the will of Zeus.

The island where Hermes first, running the sky from Sparta,
A thief with his spoil, your beauty, to cheat the ardent Paris –
Where Hermes hid his treasure, the straggling isle that lines
The Actaean coast, henceforth shall bear your name for remembrance.
Menelaus the far-voyager wins by the will of Heaven
A home in the Isle of the Blest. For the noble and brave are not
Hated by the gods; but they meet more trouble than common men.

HEOCLYMENUS:

Sons of Leda and Zeus! I renounce my bitterness of heart
For my lost bride. Let her go to her home, since Heaven so wills.
Theonoe's life I spare. Immortal Twins, the sister
Your almighty Father gave you is perfect in faith and chastity.
Women, I wish you joy in the virtuous heart of Helen –
A joy which many women can have no hope to share!

IORUS:

The gods reveal themselves in many forms,
Bring many matters to surprising ends.
The things we thought would happen do not happen;
The unexpected God makes possible:
And this is what has happened here to-day.

THE BACCHAE

*

Characters:

DIONYSUS
CHORUS *of Oriental women, devotees of Dionysus*
TEIRESIAS, *a blind Seer*
CADMUS, *founder of Thebes, and formerly king*
PENTHEUS, *his grandson, now king of Thebes*
A GUARD *attending Pentheus*
A HERDSMAN
A MESSENGER
AGAUË, *daughter of Cadmus and mother of Pentheus*

*

ene: Before the palace of Pentheus in Thebes. At one side of the stage is the monument of Semele; above it burns a low flame, and around it are the remains of ruined and blackened masonry.

DIONYSUS *enters on stage right. He has a crown of ivy, a* thyrsus *in his hand, and a fawnskin draped over his body. He has long flowing hair and a youthful, almost feminine beauty.*

IONYSUS: I am Dionysus, son of Zeus. My mother was Semele, daughter of Cadmus; I was delivered from her womb by the fire of a lightning-flash. To-day I have laid aside the appearance of a god, and have come disguised as a mortal man to this city of Thebes, where flow the two rivers, Dirce and Ismenus. Here by the palace I see the monument recording my mother's death by lightning; here are the smouldering ruins of her house, which bear the still living flame of Zeus's fire – the undying token of Hera's cruelty to my mother. Cadmus does well to keep this ground untrodden, a precinct consecrated to his daughter; and I now have decked it round with sprays of young vine-leaves.

From the fields of Lydia and Phrygia, fertile in gold
came to the sun-beaten Persian plains, the walled towns
Bactria, harsh Media, wealthy Arabia, and the whole of th
Asian sea-board where Greeks and Orientals live side by si
in crowded magnificent cities; and before reaching this, t
first city of Hellas I have seen, I had already, in all thc
regions of the East, danced my dance and established r
ritual, to make my godhead manifest to mortal men.

And the reason why Thebes is the first place in Hel
where, at my command, women have raised the Bacc
shout, put on the fawnskin cloak, and taken my weapon
their hands, the thyrsus wreathed with ivy – the reason
this: my mother's sisters said – what they should have be
the last to say – that I, Dionysus, was not the progeny
Zeus; but that Semele, being with child by some mortal,
her father's suggestion ascribed to Zeus the loss of her v
ginity; and they loudly insisted that this lie about the fath
hood of her child was the sin for which Zeus had struck h
dead.

Therefore I have plagued these same sisters with madne
and driven them all frantic out of doors; now their home
the mountains, and their wits are gone. And I made the
carry the emblems of my mysteries; and the whole fem
population of Thebes, every woman there was in the tow
I drove raving from their homes; now they have joined t
daughters of Cadmus, and there they are, sitting roofless
the rocks under the silver fir-trees. Thebes must learn, u
willing though she is, that my Bacchic revels are somethi
beyond her present knowledge and understanding; and
must vindicate the honour of my mother Semele, by ma
festing myself before the human race as the god whom s
bore to Zeus.

Now Cadmus has handed over his kingly honours and
throne to his daughter's son Pentheus. And this Pentheus
a fighter against God – he defies me, excludes me fr

libations, never names me in prayer. Therefore I will demonstrate to him, and to all Thebes, that I am a god.

When I have set all in order here, I will pass on to some other place, and manifest myself. Meanwhile, if the Theban city in anger tries to bring the Bacchae home from the mountains by force, I will join that army of women possessed and lead them to battle. And this is why I have changed my divine form to human, and appear in the likeness of a man.

Come, my holy band of revellers, women I have brought from lands of the East, from the slopes of Tmolus, bastion of Lydia, to be with me and share my travels! Raise the music of your Phrygian home, the timbrels invented by Rhea the Great Mother and by me; surround the palace of Pentheus and strike up such a peal of sound as shall make Thebes turn to look! I will go to the glens of Cithaeron where my Bacchae are, and join their dances.

DIONYSUS *goes out towards the mountain; the* CHORUS *enter where* DIONYSUS *entered, from the road by which they have travelled.*

CHORUS:

From far-off lands of Asia, [*Strophe* 1
From Tmolus the holy mountain,
We run with the god of laughter;
Labour is joy and weariness is sweet,
And our song resounds to Bacchus!

Beware of the interloper! [*Antistrophe* 1
Indoors or out, who listens?
Let every lip be holy;
Stand well aloof, be silent, while we sing
The appointed hymn to Bacchus!

Blest is the happy man [*Strophe* 2
Who knows the mysteries the gods ordain,
And sanctifies his life,

And steeps his soul in holy revelry,
And, by due ritual made pure,
Enters the ecstasy of mountain solitudes;
Who observes the mystic rites
Made lawful by Cybele the Great Mother;
Who crowns his head with ivy,
And shakes aloft his wand in worship of Dionysus.

On, on! Run, dance, delirious, possessed!
Dionysus comes to his own;
Bring from the Phrygian hills to the broad streets of Hel
The god, child of a god,
Spirit of revel and rapture, Dionysus!

Once, on the womb that held him [*Antistroph*
The fire-bolt flew from the hand of Zeus;
And pains of child-birth bound his mother fast,
And she cast him forth untimely,
And under the lightning's lash relinquished life;
And Zeus the son of Cronos
Ensconced him instantly in a secret womb
Chambered within his thigh,
And with golden pins closed him from Hera's sight.

So, when the Fates had made him ripe for birth,
Zeus bore the bull-horned god
And wreathed his head with wreaths of writhing snakes;
Which is why the Maenads catch
Wild snakes, nurse them and twine them round their hai

O Thebes, old nurse that cradled Semele, [*Stroph*
Be ivy-garlanded, burst into flower
With wreaths of lush bright-berried bryony,
Bring sprays of fir, green branches torn from oaks,
Fill soul and flesh with Bacchus' mystic power;
Fringe and bedeck your dappled fawnskin cloaks

With woolly tufts and locks of purest white.
There's a brute wildness in the fennel-wands –
Reverence it well. Soon the whole land will dance
When the god with ecstatic shout
Leads his companies out
To the mountain's mounting height
Swarming with riotous bands
Of Theban women leaving
Their spinning and their weaving
Stung with the maddening trance
Of Dionysus!

O secret chamber the Curetes knew! [*Antistrophe* 3
O holy cavern in the Cretan glade
Where Zeus was cradled, where for our delight
The triple-crested Corybantes drew
Tight the round drum-skin, till its wild beat made
Rapturous rhythm to the breathing sweetness
Of Phrygian flutes! Then divine Rhea found
The drum could give her Bacchic airs completeness;
From her, the Mother of all,
The crazy Satyrs soon,
In their dancing festival
When the second year comes round,
Seized on the timbrel's tune
To play the leading part
In feasts that delight the heart
Of Dionysus.

O what delight is in the mountains! [*Epode*
There the celebrant, wrapped in his sacred fawnskin,
Flings himself on the ground surrendered,
While the swift-footed company streams on;
There he hunts for blood, and rapturously
Eats the raw flesh of the slaughtered goat,

Hurrying on to the Phrygian or Lydian mountain heights.
Possessed, ecstatic, he leads their happy cries;
The earth flows with milk, flows with wine,
Flows with nectar of bees;
The air is thick with a scent of Syrian myrrh.
The celebrant runs entranced, whirling the torch
That blazes red from the fennel-wand in his grasp,
And with shouts he rouses the scattered bands,
Sets their feet dancing,
As he shakes his delicate locks to the wild wind.
And amidst the frenzy of song he shouts like thunder:
'On, on! Run, dance, delirious, possessed!
You, the beauty and grace of golden Tmolus,
Sing to the rattle of thunderous drums,
Sing for joy,
Praise Dionysus, god of joy!
Shout like Phrygians, sing out the tunes you know,
While the sacred pure-toned flute
Vibrates the air with holy merriment,
In time with the pulse of the feet that flock
To the mountains, to the mountains!'
And every daughter of Bacchus runs and leaps for joy,
Like a foal with its mother at pasture.

Enter TEIRESIAS. *Though blind, he makes his way unaided to the door, and knocks.*

TEIRESIAS: Who keeps the gate? [*A servant is heard answeri*
from inside.] Call out Cadmus, the son of Agenor, who ca
from Sidonia to build these walls of Thebes. Go, someo
tell him Teiresias is looking for him. He knows why I h
come – the agreement I made with him – old as I am, a
he older still – to get myself a Bacchic wand, put on t
fawnskin cloak, and wear a garland of young ivy-shoots.

Enter CADMUS.

CADMUS: O my dear friend, I knew your voice, althoug
was indoors, as soon as I heard it – the wise voice of a w

man. Look, I am ready, I have everything the god prescribes. Dionysus is my own daughter's son; and now he has shown himself to the world as a god, it is right that I should do all I can to exalt him. Where should we go to dance, and take our stand with the rest, tossing our old grey beards? You must guide me in this, Teiresias – you're nearly as old as I am, and you understand such matters. No, it won't be too much for me; I can beat time with my thyrsus night and day! It's a happy thing to forget one's age.

TEIRESIAS: Then you feel just as I do. I am young too; I'll make an attempt at the dance.

CADMUS: You don't think we should make our way to the mountains in a carriage?

TEIRESIAS: No, no, that would not show the same respect for the god.

CADMUS: I'll be your guide then – two old men together.

TEIRESIAS: The god will guide us there, and without weariness.

CADMUS: Shall we be the only men in Thebes who dance to Bacchus?

TEIRESIAS: We are the only men right-minded; the rest are perverse.

CADMUS: We are wasting time. Now, take my hand.

TEIRESIAS: There; hold firmly, with a good grip.

CADMUS: Mortals must not make light of the gods – *I* would never do so.

TEIRESIAS: We entertain no theories or speculations in divine matters. The beliefs we have received from our ancestors – beliefs as old as time – cannot be destroyed by any argument, nor by any ingenuity the mind can invent. No doubt I shall be criticized for wearing an ivy-wreath and setting off for the dance; they will say I have no sense of what befits my age. They will be wrong: the god has drawn no distinction between young and old, which should dance and which should not. He wishes to receive honour alike from all; he

will not have his worship made a matter of nice calc
tion.

CADMUS: Teiresias, since you are blind I must be your
phet. I see Pentheus the son of Echion, to whom I
resigned my rule in Thebes, hurrying towards the palace
looks thoroughly upset! What is he going to tell us?

Enter PENTHEUS. *He addresses the audience, without at
noticing* CADMUS *and* TEIRESIAS, *who stand at the opp
side of the stage.*

PENTHEUS: Although, as it happened, I was away f
Thebes, news reached me none the less of this trouble in
city. Our women, I discover, have abandoned their hc
on some pretence of Bacchic worship, and go gadding al
in the woods on the mountain side, dancing in honou
this upstart god Dionysus, whoever he may be. They tell
in the midst of each group of revellers stands a bowl fu
wine; and the women go creeping off this way and tha
lonely places and there give themselves to lecherous n
under the excuse that they are Maenad priestesses; thoug
their ritual Aphrodite comes before Bacchus.

Well, those that I've caught, my guards are keeping s
we've tied their hands, and lodged them at State expe
Those still at large on the mountain I am going to hunt
and that includes my own mother Agauë, and her sisters
and Autonoe. Once I have them secure in iron chains I s
soon put a stop to this outrageous Bacchism.

I understand too that some Oriental magician or conj
has arrived from Lydia, a fellow with golden hair flowin
scented ringlets, the flush of wine in his face and the ch
of Aphrodite in his eyes; and that he entices our young
with his Bacchic mysteries, and spends day and night in t
company. Only let me get that fellow inside my walls –
cut his head from his shoulders; that will finish his thyr
waving and hair-tossing. *He* is the one – this foreigner –
has spread stories about Dionysus, that he is a god, tha

was sewn up in Zeus's thigh. The truth about Dionysus is that he's dead, burnt to a cinder by lightning along with his mother, because she lied about Zeus – said that Zeus had lain with her. But whoever this man may be, does not his insufferable behaviour merit the worst of punishments, hanging?

He turns to go, and sees CADMUS *and* TEIRESIAS.

Why, look! Another miracle! Here's the prophet Teiresias, and my mother's father, playing the Bacchant, in dappled fawnskin and carrying fennel-wands! Well, there's a sight for laughter! [*But he is raging, not laughing.*] Sir, I am ashamed to see two men of your age with so little sense of decency. Come, you are my grandfather: throw away your garland, get rid of that thyrsus. *You* persuaded him into this, Teiresias. No doubt you hope that, when you have introduced this new god to the people, you will be his appointed seer, you will collect the fees for sacrifices. Your grey hairs are your protection; otherwise you should sit with all these crazy females in prison, for encouraging such pernicious performances.

As for women, my opinion is this: when the sparkle of sweet wine appears at their feasts, no good can be expected from their ceremonies.

CHORUS: What profanity! Sir, do you not revere the gods, or Cadmus, who sowed the seed of the earth-born men? Echion your father was one of them – will you shame your own blood?

TEIRESIAS: When a clever man has a plausible theme to argue, to be eloquent is no great feat. But though you seem, by your glib tongue, to be intelligent, yet your words are foolish. Power and eloquence in a headstrong man can only lead to folly; and such a man is a danger to the state.

This new divinity whom you ridicule – no words of mine could adequately express the ascendancy he is destined to achieve through the length and breadth of Hellas. There are

two powers, young man, which are supreme in hu
affairs: first, the goddess Demeter; she is the Earth –
her by what name you will; and she supplies mankind v
solid food. Second, Dionysus the son of Semele; the bles
he provides is the counterpart to the blessing of bread;
discovered and bestowed on men the service of drink,
juice that streams from the vine-clusters; men have bu
take their fill of wine, and the sufferings of an unhappy
are banished, each day's troubles are forgotten in slee
indeed this is our only cure for the weariness of
Dionysus, himself a god, is poured out in offering to
gods; so that through him mankind receives blessing.

Now for the legend that he was sewn up in Zeus's thig
do you mock at it? Then I will explain to you the truth
lies in the legend. When Zeus snatched the infant Diony
away from the fire of the lightning, and brought him
Olympus as a god, Hera wanted to cast him out of heav
so, to prevent her, Zeus – as you would expect – devise
plan. He broke off a piece of the sky that envelops
earth, made it into the likeness of a child, and gave it
Hera as a pledge, to soothe her jealousy. He entrusted
true Dionysus to others to bring up. Now the ancient w
for a *pledge* is very similar to our word 'thigh'; and so
time the word was mistaken, and men said Dionysus
saved by Zeus's *thigh*, instead of by Zeus's *pledge*, becaus
pledge was given to Hera in his likeness.

And this god is a prophet; for the Bacchic ecstasy a
frenzy contain a strong element of prophecy. When Diony
enters in power into a human body, he endows the possess
person with power to foretell the future. He also in so
degree shares the function of Ares, god of war. It has h
pened that an army, equipped and stationed for battle,
fled in panic before a spear has been raised. This too i
madness sent by Dionysus.

Ay, and the day will come when you shall see him on

very rocks of Delphi, amidst flaring torches bounding over the twin-peaked ridge, hurling and brandishing his Bacchic staff, honoured by all Hellas.

Come, Pentheus, listen to me. You rely on force; but it is not force that governs human affairs. If you think otherwise – beware of mistaking your perverse opinion for wisdom. Welcome Dionysus to Thebes; pour libations to him, garland your head and celebrate his rites. Dionysus will not compel women to control their lusts. Self-control in all things depends on our own natures. This is a fact you should consider; for a chaste-minded woman will come to no harm in the rites of Bacchus. And think of this too: when crowds stand at the city gates, and the people glorify the name of Pentheus, you are filled with pleasure; so, I think, Dionysus is glad to receive honour.

So then I, and Cadmus, whom you mock, will wear the ivy-wreath and join in the dancing – we are both old men, but this is our duty; and no words of yours shall persuade me to fight against the gods. For your mind is most pitifully diseased; and there is no medicine that can heal you. Yet ... there is one remedy for your madness.

HORUS: What you have said, Teiresias, means no dishonour to Phoebus, whose prophet you are; and shows your wisdom in honouring Dionysus as a great god.

ADMUS: My son, Teiresias has advised you well. Do not venture outside the customary pieties; stay with us. Just now your wits are scattered; you think you are talking sense, but it is not sense at all. And even if you are right, and this god is not a god, at least let him have your word of acknowledgment; lie for a good purpose, so that Semele may be honoured as mother of a god, and I and our whole family may gain in dignity. Remember Actaeon's tragic end; he boasted, out in these valleys, that he was a better hunter than Artemis, and was torn to pieces and devoured by the very hounds he had bred. Don't invite the same fate! Come,

let me put this ivy-wreath on your head. Join us in wo
shipping Dionysus.

PENTHEUS: Keep your hands off! Go to your Bacchic rite
and don't wipe off your crazy folly on me! But I will puni
this man who has taught you your lunacy. Go, one of yo
immediately to the place of augury where Teiresias practise
smash it with crowbars, knock down the walls, turn ever
thing upside down, fling out his holy fripperies to the wind
That will sting him more than anything else. The rest of yo
comb the city and find this effeminate foreigner, who plagu
our women with this strange disease and turns them int
whores. If you catch him, bring him here in chains, and I'
have him stoned to death. He shall be sorry he ever cam
revelling in Thebes.

Exit PENTHEUS.

TEIRESIAS: Foolhardy man, you don't know what you a
saying. You were out of your mind before; now you a
raving mad.

Come, Cadmus; let us go and pray both for this mar
brutish as he is, and for Thebes, and entreat Dionysus to b
forbearing. Come, take your thyrsus and follow. Try to sup
port me – there, we will help each other. It would be a pit
for us both to fall; but never mind that. We must pay ou
service to Dionysus the son of Zeus.

Cadmus: the name *Pentheus* means *grief*. Let us hope he
not going to bring grief on your house. I am not speaking b
inspiration; I judge by his conduct. The things he has sai
reveal the depth of his folly.

Exeunt TEIRESIAS *and* CADMUS.

CHORUS:

Holiness, Queen of heaven, [*Strophe*
Holiness, golden-winged ranging the earth,
Do you hear his blasphemy?
Pentheus dares – do you hear? – to revile the god of joy
The son of Semele, who when the gay-crowned feast is se

Is named among gods the chief;
Whose gifts are joy and union of soul in dancing,
Joy in music of flutes,
Joy when sparkling wine at feasts of the gods
Soothes the sore regret,
Banishes every grief,
When the reveller rests, enfolded deep
In the cool shade of ivy-shoots,
On wine's soft pillow of sleep.

The brash, unbridled tongue, [*Antistrophe* 1
The lawless folly of fools, will end in pain.
But the life of wise content
Is blest with quietness, escapes the storm
And keeps its house secure.
Though blessed gods dwell in the distant skies,
They watch the ways of men.
To know much is not to be wise.
Pride more than mortal hastens life to its end;
And they who in pride pretend
Beyond man's limit, will lose what lay
Close to their hand and sure.
I count it madness, and know no cure can mend
The evil man and his evil way.

O to set foot on Aphrodite's island, [*Strophe* 2
On Cyprus, haunted by the Loves, who enchant
Brief life with sweetness; or in that strange land
Whose fertile river carves a hundred channels
To enrich her rainless sand;
Or where the sacred pastures of Olympus slant
Down to Pieria, where the Muses dwell –
Take me, O Bromius, take me and inspire
Laughter and worship! There our holy spell
And ecstasy are welcome; there the gentle band
Of Graces have their home, and sweet Desire.

Dionysus, son of Zeus, delights in banquets; [*Antistrophe*
And his dear love is Peace, giver of wealth,
Saviour of young men's lives – a goddess rare!
In wine, his gift that charms all griefs away,
Alike both rich and poor may have their part.
His enemy is the man who has no care
To pass his years in happiness and health,
His days in quiet and his nights in joy,
Watchful to keep aloof both mind and heart
From men whose pride claims more than mortals may.
Quietness, the life that wins the poor man's voice,
His creed, his practice – this shall be my choice.

Some of the guards whom PENTHEUS *sent to arrest*
DIONYSUS *now enter with their prisoner.*

GUARD: Well, sir, we went after this lion you told us to hunt and we have been successful. But – we found the lion wa tame! He made no attempt to escape, but freely held out hi hands to be bound. He didn't even turn pale, but kept th fresh colour you see in his face now, smiling, and telling u to tie him up and run him in; waited for me, in fact – gav us no trouble at all. Naturally I felt a bit awkward.' You'l excuse me, sir,' I said, 'I don't want to arrest you, but it' the king's orders.'

And there's another thing, sir. Those women you rounde up and put in fetters and in prison, those religious maniacs – why, they're all gone, let loose to the glens; and there the are, dancing and calling on Bacchus. The fetters simply fel from their limbs, the bolts flew back without the touch o any mortal hand, and let the doors open. Master, this ma has come to our city of Thebes with a load of miracles. What is going to happen next is your concern, not mine.

PENTHEUS: Untie his hands. [*The guard does so.*] He is in th trap, and he's not nimble enough to escape me now.

Well, my man: you have a not unhandsome figure – fo attracting women, which is your object in coming to Thebes.

Those long curls of yours show that you're no wrestler – cascading close over your cheeks, most seductively. Your complexion, too, shows a carefully-preserved whiteness; you keep out of the sun and walk in the shade, to use your lovely face for courting Aphrodite. . . .

Ah, well; tell me first what country you were born in.

DIONYSUS: That is easily told without boasting. Doubtless you have heard of the flowery mountain, Tmolus.

PENTHEUS: Yes, the range that curves round the city of Sardis.

DIONYSUS: That was my home; I am a Lydian.

PENTHEUS: And why do you bring these rituals to Hellas?

DIONYSUS: Dionysus the son of Zeus instructed me.

PENTHEUS: Is there a Lydian Zeus, then, who begets new gods?

DIONYSUS: No; I speak of your Zeus, who made Semele his wife here in Thebes.

PENTHEUS: And when Dionysus took possession of you, did he appear in a dream by night, or visible before your eyes?

DIONYSUS: I saw him face to face; and he entrusted to me these mysteries.

PENTHEUS: What form do these mysteries of yours take?

DIONYSUS: That cannot be told to the uninitiated.

PENTHEUS: What do the worshippers gain from it?

DIONYSUS: That is not lawful for you to hear – yet it is worth hearing.

PENTHEUS: A clever answer, baited to rouse my curiosity.

DIONYSUS: Curiosity will be useless; the rites of the god abhor an impious man.

PENTHEUS: If you say you saw Dionysus clearly – what was his appearance?

DIONYSUS: It was what he wished it to be. I had no say in that.

PENTHEUS: Another clever evasion, telling nothing.

DIONYSUS: *A wise speech sleeps in a foolish ear.*

PENTHEUS: Is this the first place where you have introduced Dionysus?

DIONYSUS: No; every Eastern land dances these mysteries.

PENTHEUS: I believe it. Oriental standards are altogether inferior to ours.

DIONYSUS: In this point they are superior. But their customs are different.

PENTHEUS: Do you celebrate your mysteries by night or by day?

DIONYSUS: Chiefly by night. Darkness induces religious awe.

PENTHEUS: For women darkness is treacherous and impure.

DIONYSUS: Impurity can be practised by daylight too.

PENTHEUS: It is time you were punished for your foul, slippery tongue.

DIONYSUS: And you for your crass impieties.

PENTHEUS: How bold his Bacchic inspiration makes him! He knows how to argue too.

DIONYSUS: Tell me my sentence. What punishment are you going to inflict?

PENTHEUS: First I'll cut off your scented silky hair.

DIONYSUS: My hair I keep for the god; it is sacred to him.

PENTHEUS: Next, hand over that thyrsus.

DIONYSUS: Take it from me yourself. I carry it for Dionysus, whose it is.

PENTHEUS: And I shall keep you safe in prison.

DIONYSUS: The god himself will set me free whenever I wish.

PENTHEUS: Set you free? When you stand among those frenzied women and pray to him – no doubt!

DIONYSUS: He is here, close by me, and sees what is being done to me.

PENTHEUS: Oh, indeed? Where? To my eyes he is quite invisible.

DIONYSUS: Here at my side. You, being a blasphemer, cannot see him.

PENTHEUS [*to the guards*]: Get hold of him. He is laughing at me and the whole city.

DIONYSUS [*to the guards*]: I warn you not to bind me. . . . [*To* PENTHEUS.] I am sane, you are mad.

PENTHEUS [*to* DIONYSUS]: My orders overrule yours. [*To the guards.*] Bind him, I tell you.

DIONYSUS: You do not know what life you are living. You have forgotten who you are.

PENTHEUS: Who I am? Pentheus, son of Echion and Agauë.

DIONYSUS: *Pentheus* means 'sorrow'. The name fits you well.

PENTHEUS: Take him away. Imprison him over there in the stables; he'll have all the darkness he wants. – You can dance in there! As for these women you've brought to aid and abet you, I shall either send them to the slave market, or retain them in my own household to work at the looms; that will keep their hands from drumming on tambourines!

DIONYSUS: I will go. Nothing can happen to me that is not my destiny. But Dionysus, who you say is dead, will pursue you and take his revenge for this sacrilege. You are putting *him* in prison, when you lay hands on me.

Guards take DIONYSUS *away to the stables; Pentheus follows.*

CHORUS:

Dirce, sweet and holy maid, [*Strophe*
Acheloüs' Theban daughter,
Once the child of Zeus was made
Welcome in your welling water,
When the lord of earth and sky
Snatched him from the undying flame,
Laid him safe within his thigh,
Calling loud the infant's name:
'Twice-born Dithyrambus! Come,
Enter here your father's womb;
Bacchic child, I now proclaim
This in Thebes shall be your name.'
Now, divine Dirce, when my head is crowned

And my feet dance in Bacchus' revelry –
Now you reject me from your holy ground.
Why should you fear me? By the purple fruit
That glows in glory on Dionysus' tree,
His dread name yet shall haunt your memory!

O what anger lies beneath [*Antistrophe*
Pentheus' voice and sullen face –
Offspring of the dragon's teeth,
And Echion's earth-born race,
Brute with bloody jaws agape,
God-defying, gross and grim,
Slander of his human shape!
Soon he'll chain us limb to limb –
Bacchus' servants! Yes, and more:
Even now our comrade lies
Deep on his dark prison floor.
Dionysus! do your eyes
See us? O son of Zeus, the oppressor's rod
Falls on your worshippers; come, mighty god,
Brandish your golden thyrsus and descend
From great Olympus; touch this murderous man,
And bring his violence to a sudden end!

Where are you, Dionysus? Leading your dancing [*Epode*
bands
Over the mountain slopes, past many a wild beast's lair,
Or upon rocky crags, with the thyrsus in their hands?
Or in the wooded coverts, maybe, of Olympus, where
Orpheus once gathered the trees and mountain beasts,
Gathered them with his lyre, and sang an enchanting air.
Happy vale of Pieria! Bacchus delights in you;
He will cross the flood and foam of the Axius river, and
there

He will bring his whirling Maenads, with dancing and with feasts, –
Cross the father of waters, Lydias, generous giver
Of wealth and luck, they say, to the land he wanders through,
Whose famous horses graze by the rich and lovely river.

Suddenly a shout is heard from inside the building – the voice of DIONYSUS.

DIONYSUS:

Io, Io! Do you know my voice, do you hear?
Worshippers of Bacchus! Io, Io!

CHORUS: Who is that? Where is he? The voice of Dionysus calling to us!

DIONYSUS: Io, Io! Hear me again: I am the son of Semele, the son of Zeus!

CHORUS:

Io, Io, our lord, our lord!
Come, then, come to our company, lord of joy!

DIONYSUS: O dreadful earthquake, shake the floor of the world!

CHORUS [*with a scream of terror*]:

Pentheus' palace is falling, crumbling in pieces! [*They continue severally.*]
Dionysus stands in the palace; bow before him!
We bow before him. See how the roof and pillars
Plunge to the ground! God from the inner prison
Will shout the shout of victory.

The flame on Semele's tomb grows and brightens.

DIONYSUS:

Fan to a blaze the flame the lightning lit;
Kindle the conflagration of Pentheus' palace!

CHORUS:

Look, look, look!
Do you see, do you see the flame of Semele's tomb,
The flame that remained when she died of the lightning-stroke?

A noise of crashing masonry is heard.

Down, trembling Maenads! Hurl yourselves to the ground!
Your god is wrecking the palace, roof to floor;
He heard our cry – he is coming, the son of Zeus!

The doors open and DIONYSUS *appears.*

DIONYSUS: Women of Asia, why are you cowering terrified on the ground? You heard Bacchus himself shattering Pentheus' palace; come, stand up! Stop this trembling! Courage!

CHORUS: Oh, what a joy to hear your Bacchic shout! You have saved us. We were deserted and alone: how happy we are to see you!

DIONYSUS: Were you plunged in despair, when I was seen inside to be thrown into Pentheus' dark dungeon?

CHORUS: How could we help it? Who was there to protect us, if you were taken? But tell us how you escaped from the clutches of this wicked man.

DIONYSUS: I alone with effortless ease delivered myself.

CHORUS: But did he not bind your arms with knotted ropes?

DIONYSUS: Ha, ha! There I made a mockery of him. He thought he was binding me; but he fed himself on delusion – he neither took hold of me nor even touched me. Near the stall where he took me to shut me in, he found a bull; and he was tying his rope round the bull's knees and hooves, panting with rage, dripping sweat, and biting his lips; while I sat quietly by and watched him. And it was then that Bacchus came and shook the building and made the flame on his mother's tomb flare up. When Pentheus saw this, he imagined the place was on fire, and went rushing this way and that, calling to the servants to bring water, till the whole household was in commotion – all for nothing.

Then he thought I had escaped. He left throwing water, snatched up his murderous sword and darted into the palace. Thereupon Dionysus – or so it seemed to me; I tell what I thought – made a phantom figure appear in the palace court

yard; and Pentheus flew at it, and kept stabbing at the sunny air, imagining he was killing *me*.

But the god had further humiliation in store for him: he laid the stable-buildings in ruins on the ground – there they lie, a heap of rubble, to break his heart as he looks at my prison. Now he is helpless with exhaustion. He has dropped his sword. He, a mortal man, dared to take arms against a god. I walked quietly out of the palace, and here *I* am. Pentheus does not disturb me. But I hear his heavy tread indoors; I think he will be out here in a moment. What will he say after this? For all his rage, he shall not ruffle me. The wise man preserves a smooth-tempered self-control.

Enter PENTHEUS.

PENTHEUS: This is outrageous. That foreigner was locked up and in chains a little while ago; now he has escaped me. [*He sees* DIONYSUS *and gives an excited shout.*] That's the man! What's going on? How did you get out? How dare you show yourself here before my very doors?

DIONYSUS: Stay where you are. You are angry. Now control yourself.

PENTHEUS: You were bound and locked in: how did you escape?

DIONYSUS: Did you not hear me say that I should be set free by –

PENTHEUS: By whom? Everything you say is strange.

DIONYSUS: By him who plants for mortals the rich-clustered vine.

PENTHEUS: The god who makes men fools and women mad.

DIONYSUS: A splendid insult, that, to Dionysus!

PENTHEUS [*to attendant guards*]: Close the gates all round – every gate in the city wall.

DIONYSUS: And why? Cannot gods pass even over walls?

PENTHEUS: Oh, you know everything – except the things you ought to know.

DIONYSUS: The things one ought to know most of all, thos
things I know.

But first listen to what this man has to tell you; he com
from the mountains with news. – I will stay here; I promis
not to run away.

Enter a HERDSMAN.

HERDSMAN: Pentheus, ruler of Thebes! I come from Citha
ron, where the ground is never free from dazzling shafts
snow.

PENTHEUS: And what urgent news do you bring me?

HERDSMAN: I have seen the holy Bacchae, who in madne
went streaming bare-limbed out of the city gates. I hav
come with the intention of telling you, my lord, and th
city, of their strange and terrible doings – things past a
wonder. But I would like to know first if I may speak freel
of what is going on there, or if I should trim my words. I ar
afraid of your hastiness, my lord, your hot temper; you ar
too much like a king.

PENTHEUS: Say all that you have to say; fear nothing from me
The more terrible your story about the Bacchae, the mor
certainly will I execute justice upon this man, the instigato
of their wickedness.

HERDSMAN: Just when the sun's rays first beamed out t
warm the earth, I was pasturing my cattle and working u
towards the high ground; when I saw three groups of wome
who had been dancing together. The leader of one grou
was Autonoe; your mother Agauë was at the head of th
second, and Ino of the third. They were all sleeping
stretched out and quiet. Some rested on beds of pine
needles, some had pillows of oak-leaves; they lay just as the
had thrown themselves down on the ground, – but wit
modesty in their posture; they were not drunk with wine
as you told us, or with music of flutes; nor was there an
love-making there in the loveliness of the woods.

As soon as your mother Agauë heard the lowing of th

horned cattle, she stood up among the Bacchae and called loudly to them to rouse themselves from sleep. And they threw off the strong sleep from their eyes and leapt to their feet. They were a sight to marvel at for modesty and comeliness – women old and young, and girls still unmarried. First they let down their hair over their shoulders; those whose fawnskins had come loose from their fastenings tied them up; and they girdled the dappled fur with snakes which licked their cheeks. And some would have in their arms a young gazelle, or wild wolf-cubs, and give them their own white milk – those who had infants at home recently born, so that their breasts were still full. And they wreathed their heads with garlands of ivy and oak and flowering bryony.

And one of them took her thyrsus and struck it on the rock; and from the rock there gushed a spring of limpid water; another struck her wand down into the earth, and there the god made a fountain of wine spring up; and any who wanted milk had only to scratch the earth with the tip of her fingers, and there was the white stream flowing for her to drink; and from the ivy-bound thyrsus a sweet ooze of honey dripped. Oh! if you had been there and seen all this, you would have entreated with prayers this god whom you now accuse.

Well, we herdsmen and shepherds gathered and stood talking together, and arguing about these strange and extraordinary doings. And one fellow, a gadder up to town, and a good speaker, addressed the rest of us. 'You who live on the holy mountain heights,' he said, 'how if we should hunt down the king's mother, Agauë, bring her away from these orgies, and do the king a service?' We thought it was a good suggestion; so we hid ourselves among the leafy bushes and waited our chance.

When the set time came, the women began brandishing their wands and preparing to dance, calling in unison on the

son of Zeus, 'Iacchus! Bromius!' And the whole mount
and the wild beasts too, became a part of their joyful danc
there was nothing that was not roused to leap and run.

Now Agauë as she ran happened to pass close to me; s
sprang out of the ambush where we lay hidden, meaning
capture her. But she cried out, 'Oh, my swift hounds,
are being hunted by these men. Come, then, and follo
arm yourselves with the thyrsus, and follow me!'

So we fled, and escaped being torn in pieces by th
possessed women. But our cattle were feeding there on
fresh grass; and the Bacchae attacked them, with their b
hands. You could see Agauë take up a bellowing young hei
with full udders, and hold it by the legs with her two ar
stretched wide. Others were tearing our cows limb fr
limb, and you could see perhaps some ribs or a cleft h
being tossed high and low; and pieces of bloody flesh hu
dripping on the pine-branches. And bulls, which
moment were savagely looking along their horns, the n
were thrown bodily to the ground, dragged down by
soft hands of girls – thousands of them; and they stripped
flesh off their bodies faster than you could wink your ro
eyes.

Then, like birds, skimming the ground as they ran, th
scoured the plain which stretches by the river Asopus a
produces a rich harvest for Thebes; and like an enemy ar
they bore down on the villages of Hysiae and Erythr
which lie on the low slopes of Cithaeron, and ransack
them. They snatched up children out of the houses; all t
plunder they laid on their shoulders stayed safely there wi
out any fastening; nothing fell to the dark earth, not bron
or iron even; they carried fire on their heads, and their h
was not burnt.

The villagers, of course, were furious at being plunder
by the Bacchae, and they resisted with weapons; and the
my lord, was an astonishing sight to behold. The spears c

by the villagers drew no blood; but the women, hurling the thyrsus like a spear, dealt wounds; those women turned the men to flight. There was the power of a god in that.

Then they went back to the place they had started from, to those fountains the god had made flow for them. And they washed off the blood, and the snakes licked the stains clean from their cheeks.

So, master, whoever this god may be, receive him in our city. He has great power in many ways; but especially, as I hear, it was he who gave men the gift of the vine as a cure for sorrow. And if there were no more wine, why, there's an end of love, and of every other pleasure in life.

CHORUS: I hesitate to speak freely before the king; yet I will say it: there is no greater god than Dionysus.

PENTHEUS: This outrageous Bacchism advances on us like a spreading fire, disgracing us before all Hellas. We must waste no time. [*To the* HERDSMAN.] Go at once to the Electran gate; tell all my men who bear shields, heavy or light, all who ride fast horses or twang the bowstring, to meet me there in readiness for an assault on the Bacchae. This is past all bearing, if we are to let women so defy us.

DIONYSUS: You refuse, Pentheus, to listen to what I say or to alter your behaviour. Yet, in spite of all I have suffered at your hands, I warn you to stay where you are and not to take arms against a god. Dionysus will not stand quietly by and see you drive his Bacchae from their mountain rites.

PENTHEUS: I want no instruction from you. You have escaped from your fetters – be content; or I will punish you again.

DIONYSUS: You are a mortal, he is a god. If I were you I would control my rage and sacrifice to him, rather than kick against the pricks.

PENTHEUS: Sacrifice! I will indeed – an offering of women's blood, slaughtered as they deserve in the glens of Cithaeron.

DIONYSUS: You will all be put to flight. It would be disgrace-

ful for the wands of Bacchic women to rout your braz
shields.

PENTHEUS: This foreigner is an impossible man to deal wit
in prison or out, he will not hold his tongue.

DIONYSUS: My friend! A happy settlement may still be foun

PENTHEUS: How? By making me a slave to my own slaves

DIONYSUS: I will bring those women here, without use
weapons.

PENTHEUS: Heaven help us, you are plotting some trick.

DIONYSUS: A trick? If I use my power to save you?

PENTHEUS: This is something you have arranged with t
women, so that the revelling may continue.

DIONYSUS: This is something, certainly, that I have arrang
– not with them, but with the god.

PENTHEUS: That is enough from you. – Bring out my armou
there!

DIONYSUS [*with an authoritative shout*]: Wait! [*Then, quietly*
Would you like *to see* those women, sitting together, the
in the mountains?

PENTHEUS: Yes, indeed; I would give a large sum of gold
see them.

From now on DIONYSUS *gradually establishes a complete ascendancy over* PENTHEUS.

DIONYSUS: And what has betrayed you into this great eage
ness?

PENTHEUS: I am not eager to see them drunk; that would b
a painful sight.

DIONYSUS: Yet you would be glad to see a sight that woul
pain you?

PENTHEUS: I would, yes; if I could sit quietly under the pin
trees and watch.

DIONYSUS: Even if you go secretly they will track you dow

PENTHEUS: You are quite right. I will go openly.

DIONYSUS: Shall I show you the way, then? You will ventu
on this?

PENTHEUS: Lead me there at once; I am impatient.
DIONYSUS: Then, first dress yourself in a fine linen gown.
PENTHEUS: Why a linen gown? Must I change my sex?
DIONYSUS: They will kill you if you are seen there dressed as a man.
PENTHEUS: You are quite right; you think of everything!
DIONYSUS: It was Dionysus who inspired me with that thought.
PENTHEUS: How can your suggestion best be carried out?
DIONYSUS: I will come indoors with you and dress you.
PENTHEUS: Dress me? Not in woman's clothes? I would be ashamed.
DIONYSUS: You have lost your enthusiasm for watching the Maenads.
PENTHEUS: What kind of dress do you say you will put on me?
DIONYSUS: I will cover your head with long, flowing hair.
PENTHEUS: And after that? What will my costume look like?
DIONYSUS: A robe falling to your feet; and a snood on your head.
PENTHEUS: Anything else?
DIONYSUS: A thyrsus in your hand, and a dappled fawnskin round you.
PENTHEUS: I could never wear woman's clothes.
DIONYSUS: If you join battle with the Bacchae there will be bloodshed.
PENTHEUS: You are right; I must first go to spy on them.
DIONYSUS: That is wiser than inviting violence by using it.
PENTHEUS: And how shall I get through the streets of Thebes without being seen?
DIONYSUS: We will go by lonely ways; I will guide you.
PENTHEUS: I must not be laughed at by the Bacchae – anything rather than that. Now I will go in, and decide how best to act.
DIONYSUS: You may. My own preparations are all made.

PENTHEUS: I will go, then; and I will either visit the mountains – or else I will follow your advice.

Exit PENTHEUS.

DIONYSUS: Women, this man is walking into the net. He will visit the Bacchae; and there he shall be punished with death.

Dionysus (for you are not far away), all is now in your hands. Let us be revenged on him! And – first assail him with fantastic madness and drive him out of his mind; for while he is sane he will never consent to put on a woman's clothes; but once he has broken from the rein of reason he will put them on. I long to set Thebes laughing at him, as I lead him dressed like a woman through the streets; to humble him from the arrogance with which he threatened me at first.

Now I will go, to array Pentheus in the dress which he will take down with him to the world of the dead, slaughtered by his own mother's hands. And he shall know the son of Zeus, Dionysus; who, though most gentle to mankind, can prove a god of terror irresistible.

DIONYSUS *follows* PENTHEUS *into the palace.*

CHORUS:

O for long nights of worship, gay [*Strophe*
With the pale gleam of dancing feet,
With head tossed high to the dewy air –
Pleasure mysterious and sweet!
O for the joy of a fawn at play
In the fragrant meadow's green delight,
Who has leapt out free from the woven snare,
Away from the terror of chase and flight,
And the huntsman's shout, and the straining pack,
And skims the sand by the river's brim
With the speed of wind in each aching limb,
To the blessed lonely forest where
The soil's unmarked by a human track,
And leaves hang thick and the shades are dim.

What prayer should we call wise? [*Refrain*
What gift of Heaven should man
Count a more noble prize,
A prayer more prudent, than
To stretch a conquering arm
Over the fallen crest
Of those who wished us harm?
And what is noble every heart loves best.

Slow, yet unfailing, move the Powers [*Antistrophe*
Of heaven with the moving hours.
When mind runs mad, dishonours God,
And worships self and senseless pride,
Then Law eternal wields the rod.
Still Heaven hunts down the impious man,
Though divine subtlety may hide
Time's creeping foot. No mortal ought
To challenge Time – to overbear
Custom in act, or age in thought.
All men, at little cost, may share
The blessing of a pious creed;
Truths more than mortal, which began
In the beginning, and belong
To very nature – these indeed
Reign in our world, are fixed and strong.

What prayer should we call wise? [*Refrain*
What gift of heaven should man
Count a more noble prize,
A prayer more prudent, than
To stretch a conquering arm
Over the fallen crest
Of those who wished us harm?
And what is noble every heart loves best.

Blest is the man who cheats the stormy sea [*Epod*
And safely moors beside the sheltering quay;
So, blest is he who triumphs over trial.
One man, by various means, in wealth or strength
Outdoes his neighbour; hope in a thousand hearts
Colours a thousand different dreams; at length
Some find a dear fulfilment, some denial.
But this I say,
That he who best
Enjoys each passing day
Is truly blest.

Enter DIONYSUS. *He turns to call* PENTHEUS.

DIONYSUS: Come, perverse man, greedy for sights you should not see, impatient for deeds you should not do – Pentheus Come out of the palace and show yourself to me, wearing the garb of a frenzied Bacchic woman, ready to spy on your mother and all her company!

Enter PENTHEUS *dressed as a Bacchic devotee. He is dazed, and entirely subservient to* DIONYSUS.

Ah! You look exactly like one of Cadmus' daughters.

PENTHEUS: Why – I seem to see two suns; I see a double Thebes, and the city wall with its seven gates – double! I see you leading me forward – you are like a bull, you have horns growing on your head. Tell me, were you an animal a little while ago? You have certainly become a bull.

DIONYSUS: The god did not favour us before; now he is with us, and we have made our peace with him. Now you see as you ought to see.

PENTHEUS: Well, how do I look? Do you think I stand like Ino or like my mother Agauë?

DIONYSUS: I think you are their very image. Wait – this curl of hair is out of place, not as I arranged it under your snood.

PENTHEUS: I must have shaken it loose indoors, tossing my head up and down like a Bacchic reveller.

DIONYSUS: Come, it is for me to look after you; I will set it straight. Now, lift your head.

PENTHEUS: There, *you* put it right. I depend entirely on you.

DIONYSUS: And your girdle is loose; and the folds of your gown are not hanging straight to your ankles.

PENTHEUS: I agree, they are not – at least, here by the right foot. But on the other side the gown hangs well to the heel.

DIONYSUS: I think you will reckon me the chief of your friends, when you see the Bacchae and find to your surprise how well they are behaving – will you not?

But PENTHEUS *is not listening.*

PENTHEUS: Ought I to hold my thyrsus in this hand or in the right, to look more like a Bacchanal?

DIONYSUS: Hold it in your right hand, and raise it at the same time as you raise your right foot. [PENTHEUS *attempts it.*] I am glad you are so – changed in mind.

PENTHEUS: Do you think I could lift up on my shoulders the glens of Cithaeron, with all the women revelling there?

DIONYSUS: You could, if you wished. Before, your mind was diseased; now, it is as it should be.

PENTHEUS: Shall we take crowbars? Or shall I simply set my shoulder, or my arm, against the mountain peaks, and tear them up with my hands?

DIONYSUS: No, you must not destroy the homes of the Nymphs, and the haunts where Pan sits piping.

PENTHEUS: You are right. Women are not to be subdued by brute force. I will hide among the pine-trees.

DIONYSUS: Hide? Yes! You shall find the right hiding-place to hide you – coming like a crafty spy to watch the Maenads!

PENTHEUS: Yes, I can picture them – like birds in the thickets, wrapped in the sweet snare of love.

DIONYSUS: That is the very thing you are going to look for; and perhaps you will catch them – if you are not first caught yourself.

PENTHEUS: Now lead me through the central streets of

Thebes. There is no one dares to do this – I am the only *ma*
among them.

DIONYSUS: You alone suffer for the whole city – you alone
and the struggle that awaits you is your destined ordea
Come; I will see you safely there; another shall bring yo
home.

PENTHEUS: You mean my mother?

DIONYSUS: A sight for all to see.

PENTHEUS: It is for that I am going.

DIONYSUS: You will be carried home –

PENTHEUS: What splendour that will be!

DIONYSUS: – in your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS: Why, you make a weakling of me!

DIONYSUS: That is – one way of putting it.

PENTHEUS: Yet it is what I deserve.

Exit PENTHEUS.

DIONYSUS: Pentheus, you are a man to make men fear; an
fearful are the lengths you go to, and the end to which yo
will come! – an end that shall raise your fame to the heigh
of heaven. Stretch out your hands, Agauë, and you her si
ters, daughters of Cadmus! I am bringing the young man t
his battle; and I and Dionysus shall be victors. [*Then he ad*
quietly] What more shall happen, the event will show.

Exit DIONYSUS.

CHORUS:

Hounds of Madness, fly to the mountain, fly [*Stroph*
Where Cadmus' daughters are dancing in ecstasy!
Madden them, like a frenzied herd stampeding,
Against the madman hiding in woman's clothes
To spy on the Maenad's rapture!
First his mother shall see him craning his neck
Down from a rounded rock or a withered trunk,
And shout to the Maenads, 'Who is the man, you Bacchae,
Who has come to the mountain, come to the mounta
spying

On the swift wild mountain-dances of Cadmus' daughters?
Which of you is his mother?
No, that lad never lay in a woman's womb;
A lioness gave him suck, or a Libyan Gorgon!'

Justice, now be revealed! Now let your sword
Thrust – through and through – to sever the throat
Of the godless, lawless, shameless son of Echion,
Who sprang from the womb of Earth!

See! With contempt of right, with a reckless rage [*Antistrophe*
To combat your and your mother's mysteries, Bacchus,
With maniac fury out he goes, stark mad,
For a trial of strength against *your* invincible arm!
The sober and humble heart
That accords the gods their due without carp or cavil,
And knows that his days are as dust, shall live untouched.
I have no wish to grudge the wise their wisdom;
But the joys *I* seek are greater, outshine all others,
And lead our life to goodness and loveliness:
The joy of the holy heart
That night and day is bent to honour the gods
And disown all custom that breaks the bounds of right.

Justice, now be revealed! Now let your sword
Thrust – through and through – to sever the throat
Of the godless, lawless, shameless son of Echion,
Who sprang from the womb of Earth!

Then with growing excitement, shouting in unison, and dancing to the rhythm of their words.

Come, Dionysus! [*Epode*
Come, and appear to us!
Come like a bull or a
Hundred-headed serpent,

Come like a lion snorting
Flame from your nostrils!
Swoop down, Bacchus, on the
Hunter of the Bacchae;
Smile at him and snare him;
Then let the stampeding
Herd of the Maenads
Throw him and throttle him,
Catch, trip, trample him to death!

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER: O house once glorious throughout Hellas, house of the old Sidonian king who sowed in this soil the dragon's earth-born crop! How I weep for you! I am a slave; but a good slave feels the blow that strikes his master.

CHORUS: What has happened? Have you news from the mountains?

MESSENGER: Pentheus, the son of Echion, is dead.

CHORUS: Dionysus, god of rapture! Your power is revealed

MESSENGER: What? What did you say? Do you even exult at the cruel end that has overtaken my master?

CHORUS: I am no Greek; I sing for joy in a foreign tune. Now I've no need to cower in terror of prison.

MESSENGER: Do you suppose Thebes has no men left to take command?

CHORUS: Dionysus commands *me;* not Thebes, but Dionysus.

MESSENGER: Allowance must be made for you; yet, when irreparable wrong has been done, it is shameful to rejoice.

CHORUS: Tell me what happened; tell me, how did he die – this tyrant pursuing his tyranny?

MESSENGER: When we had left the houses of Thebes behind, and crossed the river Asopus, we began climbing the foothills of Cithaeron, Pentheus and I – I was attending my master –, and that foreigner who was showing us the way to what we were to see.

Well, first we sat down in a grassy glade; we kept our

footsteps and our talk as quiet as possible, so as to see without being seen. We were in a valley full of streams, with cliffs on either side; and there, under the close shade of pine-trees, the Maenads were sitting, their hands busy at their happy tasks. Some of them were twining with fresh leaves a thyrsus that had lost its ivy; others, like foals let loose from the painted yokes, were singing holy songs to each other in turn.

But the ill-fated Pentheus did not see these women; and he said, 'From where we are standing, my friend, I cannot clearly make out these pretended worshippers, these Maenads; if I climbed a towering pine-tree on the cliff-side I could have a proper view of their shameful behaviour.'

And then – I saw that foreigner do an amazing thing. He took hold of the topmost skiey branch of a pine and dragged it down, down, down to the dark earth. It was bent in a circle as a bow is bent, as the curve of a wheel, drawn with peg and line, bends the running rim to its own shape; so the foreigner took that mountain-pine in his hands and bent it to the ground – a thing no mortal man could do. Then he set Pentheus on the top branches, and began letting the tree spring upright, slipping it steadily through his grip, and taking care not to unseat him; and the pine-trunk straightened itself and soared into the soaring sky with the King sitting astride; so that he was more plainly visible to the women than they were to him.

And he was just coming into view on his lofty perch, – the foreigner was nowhere to be seen – when a voice – I suppose it was Dionysus – pealed out from heaven: 'Women! I bring you the man who made a mockery of you, and of me, and of my holy rites. Now punish him.' And in the very moment the voice spoke, a flash of unearthly fire stretched between the sky and the ground.

The whole air fell silent. The wooded glade held every leaf silent. You could hear no cry of any beast. The women

had not caught distinctly what the voice said; they stood up and gazed around. Then came a second word of command. As soon as Cadmus' daughters recognized the clear bidding of Bacchus, they darted forward with the speed of doves on the wing, and all the Bacchae after them. Up the valley, along by the stream, over the rocks they went leaping on, possessed with the very breath of the god. When they saw the king sitting in the tree, first they climbed the cliff where it rose up like a battlement, and with all their strength pelted him with pieces of rock, or aimed pine-branches at him like javelins. Some were hurling the thyrsus at their pitiable target; but the shots fell short – the height was too great for all their efforts; while the wretched man sat there trapped and helpless.

At last, with a force like lightning, they tore down branches of oak, and used these as levers, trying to tear out the tree's roots. All their struggles were useless. Then Agauë spoke to them: 'Come, you Maenads, stand round the tree and grip it. We must catch this climbing beast, or he will reveal the secret dances of Dionysus.' A thousand hands grasped the tree; and they tore it from the earth. Then from his high perch plunging and crashing to the ground came Pentheus, with one incessant scream as he understood what end was near.

First his mother, as priestess, began the ritual of death, and fell upon him. He tore off the headband from his hair, that his wretched mother might recognize him and not kill him. 'Mother!' he cried, touching her cheek, 'it is I, your son, Pentheus, whom you bore to Echion. O mother, have mercy on me; I have sinned, but I am your son: do not kill me!'

Agauë was foaming at the mouth, her eyes were rolling wildly. She was not in her right mind; she was under the power of Dionysus; and she would not listen to him. She gripped his right arm between wrist and elbow; she set her foot against his ribs; and she tore his arm off by the shoulder.

It was no strength of hers that did it; the god was in her fingers and made it easy. Ino was at him on the other side, tearing at his flesh; and now Autonoe joined them, and the whole pack of raving women. There was a single continuous yell – Pentheus shrieking as long as life was left in him, the women howling in triumph. One of them was carrying an arm, another had a foot with the shoe still on it; the ribs were stripped – clawed clean. Every hand was thick red with blood; and they were tossing and catching, to and fro, like a ball, the flesh of Pentheus.

His body lies scattered, some under hard rocks, some in the deep green woods; it will not be easy to find. His poor head – his mother is holding it; she has fixed it on the point of her thyrsus, and carries it openly over the mountain-side, leaving her sisters dancing with the Maenads. And she is coming here to the palace, exulting in her fearful and horrible prey, shouting to Bacchus as her fellow-hunter, calling him her partner in the kill, her comrade in victory. But Bacchus gives her tears for her reward.

I am going; I want to be far away from this horror before Agauë comes.

The noblest thing a man can have is a humble and quiet heart that reveres the gods. I think that is also the wisest thing for a man to possess, if he will but use it.

Exit.

HORUS:

Let us dance a dance to Bacchus, shout and sing
For the fall of Pentheus, heir of the dragon's seed,
Who hid his beard in a woman's gown,
And sealed his death with the holy sign
Of ivy wreathing a fennel-reed,
When bull led man to the ritual slaughter-ring.
Frenzied daughters of Cadmus, what renown
Your victory wins you – such a song
As groans must stifle, tears must drown!

Emblem of conquest, brave and fine! –
A mother's hand, defiled
With blood and dripping red
Caresses the torn head
Of her own murdered child!

But look! I see Pentheus' mother, Agauë, running toward the palace, with eyes wildly rolling. Welcome the worshipping company of Dionysus!

AGAUË *appears, frenzied and panting, with* PENTHEUS' *head held in her hand. The rest of her band of devotees, whom the* CHORUS *saw approaching with her, do not enter; but a few are seen standing by the entrance, where they wait until the end of the play.*

AGAUË: Women of Asia! Worshippers of Bacchus!

AGAUË *tries to show them* PENTHEUS' *head; they shrink from it.*

CHORUS: Why do you urge me? Oh!

AGAUË: I am bringing home from the mountains
A vine-branch freshly cut,
For the gods have blessed our hunting.

CHORUS: We see it . . . and welcome you in fellowship.

AGAUË: I caught him without a trap,
A lion-cub, young and wild.
Look, you may see him: there!

CHORUS: Where was it?

AGAUË: On Cithaeron;
The wild and empty mountain –

CHORUS: Cithaeron!

AGAUË: . . . spilt his life-blood.

CHORUS: Who shot him?

AGAUË: I was first;
All the women are singing,
'Honour to great Agauë!'

CHORUS: And then – who next?

AGAUË: Why, Cadmus' ...
CHORUS: What – Cadmus?
AGAUË: Yes, his daughters –
But after me, after me –
Laid their hands to the kill.
To-day was a splendid hunt!
Come now, join in the feast!
CHORUS: What, wretched woman? *Feast?*
AGAUË [*tenderly stroking the head as she holds it*]:
This calf is young: how thickly
The new-grown hair goes crisping
Up to his delicate crest!
CHORUS: Indeed, his long hair makes him
Look like some wild creature.
AGAUË: The god is a skilled hunter;
And he poised his hunting women,
And hurled them at the quarry.
CHORUS: True, our god is a hunter.
AGAUË: Do you praise me?
CHORUS: Yes, we praise you.
AGAUË: So will the sons of Cadmus ...
CHORUS: And Pentheus too, Agauë?
AGAUË: Yes, he will praise his mother
For the lion-cub she killed.
CHORUS: Oh, fearful!
AGAUË: Ay, fearful!
CHORUS: You are happy?
AGAUË: I am enraptured;
Great in the eyes of the world,
Great are the deeds I've done,
And the hunt that I hunted there!
CHORUS: Then, poor Agauë, show this triumphant spoil of yours that you've carried home – show it to the people of Thebes.
AGAUË: Come, then, all you Thebans who live in this lofty

and lovely city, come and see the beast we have caught and killed – we, Cadmus' daughters; caught not with nets or thonged Thessalian javelins, but with our own white arms and fingers. After this, should huntsmen boast, who buy their paltry tools from the armourer? We with our bare hands caught this quarry, then tore it limb from limb.

Where is my father? Let him come here! And my son Pentheus, where is he? Let him get a strong ladder, and take this head, and climb up and nail it to the top of the palace wall, this lion that I hunted and brought home!

Enter CADMUS *with attendants bearing the body of* PENTHEUS.

CADMUS: Come, men. Bring your sad burden that was Pentheus; bring him to his home. I found the fragments of his body scattered in a thousand places, no two together, about the glens of Cithaeron, or hidden in thick woods; and with weary search I gathered them, and have brought them here.

I had already returned with old Teiresias from the Bacchic dance, and was inside the walls of the city, when news was brought me of my daughters' terrible deed. I turned straight back to the mountain; and here I bring my son, killed by the Maenads. I saw Autonoe, who bore Acteon to Aristaeus, and her sister Ino, there among the copses, still in their unhappy frenzy; but I understand that Agauë came raving towards the palace – it is true, there she is! Oh, what a terrible sight!

AGAUË: Father! You may boast as loudly as you will, that no man living is so blest in his daughters; I mean all three, but myself especially. I have left weaving at the loom for greater things – for hunting wild beasts with my bare hands. See here what I carry in my arms; this is the prize I won; I have brought it to hang on your palace wall. Take it, Father; hold it. Be proud of my hunting, and call your friends to a banquet; let them all envy and congratulate you, for the splendour of my deed.

CADMUS: O anguish unmeasured, intolerable! O pitiful hands – your splendid deed is murder! What victim is this you

would lay at the gods' feet, calling Thebes, and me, to a banquet? Your suffering is worst, but mine is next. Dionysus, god of joy, has been just, but too cruel. He was born of my blood, and he has destroyed my house.

AGAUË: How ill-humoured old age makes a man! How he scowls at me! I wish that my son were a great hunter, like his mother, pursuing wild beasts with all the young men of Thebes; but he can only fight against gods. Father, you must reason with him. Let someone call him here before me, to see my good fortune.

CADMUS: Oh, my daughters! If you come to understand what you have done, how terrible your suffering will be! But if you remain always as you are now, though you could not be called happy, at least you will not know your own misery.

AGAUË: Misery? What is wrong? Where is my cause for misery?

CADMUS: First, turn your eyes this way – look at the sky.

AGAUË: I am looking. Why do you tell me to look at it?

CADMUS: Is it still the same, or does it seem to you to have changed?

AGAUË: It is brighter than before – more luminous.

CADMUS: And this madness you suffered from – is it still with you?

AGAUË: I do not know what you mean. But I feel a change in my mind; my thoughts are somehow clearer.

CADMUS: Can you now hear and answer clearly?

AGAUË: Yes ... I have forgotten what we said just now, Father.

CADMUS: When you were married, whose house did you come to?

AGAUË: You gave me to Echion, who was said to have been sown in the ground.

CADMUS: Then, Echion had a son born to him – who was he?

AGAUË: Pentheus – my son and his father's.

CADMUS: Yes: and whose head is that you hold in your arms?

AGAUË: A lion's – or so the women said who hunted it.

CADMUS: Now look straight at it; it is not much trouble to look.

AGAUË *looks at the head in silence; then cries out.*

AGAUË: Oh! What am I looking at? What am I holding?

CADMUS: Look at it steadily, and understand more clearly.

AGAUË: I see – O gods, what horror! What torture!

CADMUS: Does this seem to you like a lion?

AGAUË: No, it is Pentheus' head I hold in my accursed hand.

CADMUS: Tears have been shed for him already – before you knew it was he.

AGAUË: Who killed him? How did he come into my hands?

CADMUS: O bitter truth, revealed in a cruel hour!

AGAUË: Tell me – my heart is bursting – I must know the rest.

CADMUS: You killed him – you and your sisters.

AGAUË: Where was it done? At home? Or where else?

CADMUS: Where Actaeon was torn by hounds.

AGAUË: Cithaeron? What evil fate brought Pentheus there?

CADMUS: He went in scorn of Dionysus and your frenzied worship.

AGAUË: But how was it we were all there?

CADMUS: You were mad; the whole city was possessed by Dionysus.

AGAUË: Now I understand: Dionysus has destroyed us.

CADMUS: He was insulted and abused. You did not acknowledge his godhead.

AGAUË: Where is the dear body of my son, Father?

CADMUS: It is here. I searched long for it, and brought it.

AGAUË: Is it decently composed, limb to limb?

CADMUS: *Not yet; we came here as quickly as possible.

AGAUË: I will do it myself, if I may be allowed to touch him.

CADMUS: You will be allowed; your guilt is not greater than his.*

* See note on p. 234.

GAUË: But what part had Pentheus in my madness?

CADMUS: He was like you in not reverencing Dionysus. Therefore the god has joined all in one destruction, you and your sisters, and Pentheus, to strike down my house and me. I have no son; and now I see the child of your womb, my unhappy daughter, cut off by a shameful and horrible death. Pentheus, dear boy, my daughter's child, this house looked to you as its head; you were its bond of strength; and Thebes feared you. No man would slight your old grandfather if he saw you near; you would give him his deserts. Now I, Cadmus the Great, who sowed in the ground the seed of the Theban race, and reaped a glorious harvest, shall live, a dishonoured exile, far from my home.

O dearest son – yes, even in death you shall be held most dear to me – never again will you touch my beard, and call me Grandfather, and put your arm round me and say, 'Who has wronged you, or insulted you? Who is unkind to you or vexes you? Tell me, Grandfather, that I may punish him.'... Never again. Now there is only misery for me, suffering for you, tears for your mother, torment for all our family.

If there be any man who derides the unseen world, let him consider the death of Pentheus, and acknowledge the gods.

HORUS: Cadmus, I grieve for you. Your grandson suffered justly, but you most cruelly.

GAUË: *Father, you see how one terrible hour has shattered my whole life, and turned my pride to shame, my happiness to horror. Now I long only to compose my son's body for burial, and lament for him; and then to go away and die. But I do not know if this is lawful; my hands are filthy with a pollution of their own making. When I have spilt the blood that is my own, torn the flesh that grew in my own womb, how can I, without offence to the gods, clasp him to my

* See note on p. 234.

breast, or chant his ritual dirge? Yet I beg you, if you think it not blasphemous, let me touch my son, and say farewell to that dear body which I loved, and destroyed unknowing. It is right that you should pity, for you suffer too, although you have not sinned.

CADMUS: My daughter, you and I and our whole house are crushed and broken by the anger of Dionysus. It is not for me to keep you from your son. Only I would warn you to steel your heart against a sight that must be fearful to any eyes, but most of all to a mother's. [*To his attendants*] Lay your burden here before her, and remove the covering, that Agauë may see her son.

The coffin is laid on the ground before AGAUË, *who kneels beside it.*

AGAUË: O dearest child, how unnatural are these tears, that should have fallen from your eyes upon my dead face. Now I shall die with none to weep for me. I am justly punished; for in pride I blasphemed the god Dionysus, and did not understand the things I ought to have understood. You too are punished for the same sin; and I cannot tell whether your fate or mine is the more terrible. But since you have suffered with me, you will forgive me both for what I did, not knowing what I did, and for what I do now, touching you with unholy hands – at once your cruellest enemy and your dearest lover.

Now I place your limbs as they should lie; I kiss the flesh that my own body fed, my own care reared to manhood. Come, father, help me; lay his poor head here; as far as we can, make all exact and seemly.

O dearest face, O young fresh cheek; O kingly eyes, your light now darkened! O my son! See, with this veil I now cover your head, your torn and bloodstained limbs.

Now take him up and carry him to burial – a king lured to a shameful death by the anger of a god.

DIONYSUS *appears above the wall of the palace.*

CHORUS: But look! What is this? It is he, our lord Dionysus himself, no longer disguised as mortal, but in the glory of his godhead!

DIONYSUS: Behold me, a god great and powerful, Dionysus, immortal son of Zeus and Semele!

I come to the City of Seven Gates, to Thebes, whose men and women mocked me, denied my divinity, and refused to receive my holy rites. Now they see clearly the result of impious folly. The royal house is overthrown; the city's streets are full of guilty fear, as every Theban repents too late for his blindness and blasphemy. First and chief in sin was this man Pentheus, who not only rejected my just claims, but put me in fetters and insulted me. Therefore death came to him in the most shameful way of all, at the hands of his own mother. This fate he has justly suffered; for no god can see his worship scorned, and hear his name profaned, and not pursue vengeance to the utmost limit; that mortal men may know that the gods are greater than they.

Now listen further, while I reveal what is destined for the people of Thebes. The day will come when they will be driven from their city to wander East and West over the earth; for Zeus will not suffer a godless city to remain.

Agauë and her sisters must leave Thebes this very day; their exile will prove a full and just penance for the foul pollution they have incurred in this bloodshed. Never again shall they see their native land; for it is an offence to piety that hands so defiled should remain to take part in the city's sacrifices.

Now, Cadmus, I will tell you what suffering you yourself are destined to fulfil.* You shall change your form to a serpent; and your wife Harmonia, whom you, though mortal, received from her divine father Ares, shall likewise change to a beast of the earth, and become a snake. Thus

* See note on p. 234.

says the oracle of Zeus: You, at the head of a barbaric army, shall with your wife drive a pair of oxen yoked to a wagon; with your innumerable host you shall destroy many cities; but when they plunder the temple of Apollo's oracle, their reward shall be sorrow at their home-coming. But you yourself and Harmonia shall be saved by Ares, who shall bestow on you immortal life among the blessed ones.

I, who tell you this, am Dionysus, son of no mortal father, but of Zeus. If you all had chosen wisdom, when you would not, you would have found the son of Zeus your friend, and you would now be happy.

CADMUS: Dionysus, have mercy on us; we have sinned.

DIONYSUS: You recognize me too late; when you should have known me, you did not.

CADMUS: All this we have realized; but your vengeance is too heavy.

DIONYSUS: I am a god; and you insulted me.

CADMUS: Gods should not be like men, keeping anger for ever.

DIONYSUS: Zeus my father ordained this from the beginning.

AGAUË: All hope is gone, father. Our sentence is passed: we are exiles.

DIONYSUS: Why then put off what is inevitable?

Exit DIONYSUS.

CADMUS: O my daughter, what utter misery and horror has overtaken us all – you, and your sisters, and me your unhappy father. In my old age I must leave my home and travel to strange lands. Further than that, it is foretold that I shall lead a mixed barbarian horde against Hellas. Both I and my wife, Harmonia, child of Ares, must take the brute form of serpents, and thus I am to lead her, at the head of an armed force, to desecrate the altars and tombs of the Hellenes. And I am to find no respite from suffering; I may not even cross the deep-flowing stream of Acheron to find peace in death.

AGAUË: And I shall live in exile, separated from you, father.

CADMUS: Poor child! Why do you throw your arms round me, cherishing my white hair as a swan cares for its old and helpless ones?

AGAUË: Where am I to turn, driven from my home and country?

CADMUS: I do not know, child; your father is little help to you.

AGAUË:

Farewell, my home; farewell the land I know.
Exiled, accursed and wretched, now I go
Forth from this door where first I came a bride.

CADMUS:

Go, daughter; find some secret place to hide
Your shame and sorrow.

AGAUË: Father, I weep for you.

CADMUS: I for your suffering, and your sisters' too.

AGAUË:

There is strange tyranny in the god who sent
Against your house this cruel punishment.

CADMUS:

Not strange: our citizens despised his claim,
And you, and they, put him to open shame.

AGAUË: Father, farewell.

CADMUS: Poor child! I cannot tell
How you can *fare well;* yet I say, Farewell.

AGAUË:

I go to lead my sisters by the hand
To share my wretchedness in a foreign land.
She turns to the Theban women who have been waiting at the edge of the stage.
Come, see me forth.
Gods, lead me to some place
Where loath'd Cithaeron may not see my face,
Nor I Cithaeron. I have had my fill
Of mountain-ecstasy; now take who will

My holy ivy-wreath, my thyrsus-rod,
All that reminds me how I served this god!

Exit, followed by CADMUS.

CHORUS:

Gods manifest themselves in many forms,
Bring many matters to surprising ends;
The things we thought would happen do not happen;
The unexpected God makes possible:
And that is what has happened here to-day.

Exeun

NOTES

*

ION

P. 35 *Phoebus Apollo:* also frequently called Loxias, a name applying especially to his prophetic function. In the translation I have generally used 'Apollo' to avoid confusion.

P. 36 *Erichthonius:* the father of Erechtheus.

P. 43 *Is the common story true . . . ?* If the conversation which occupies the next 25 lines is compared with that on p. 52, beginning for example at 'Ha! another child of the earth!' I think there will be no doubt as to which passage Euripides meant to be accepted as giving the real facts of Ion's birth.

P. 57 *I'm worn out:* it is a convention that old men need help in walking when they arrive; sometimes, as in this instance, the excitement of action later makes them (or their author) forget their feebleness. The same thing happens with Peleus in *Andromache.*

P. 64 *At that time the Earth . . .:* the whole of this passage is 'stichomythia', i.e., the characters alternate with a single line each. The Greek language was at home in such quick exchange; in English it would be tedious, and I have therefore telescoped some of the lines to vary the length of speech.

P. 67 *Look now, you who with . . .:* in this last stanza the Chorus step, as it were, out of the drama and address the audience, and in particular any poet or playwright who may be present. The lines are interesting as coming from one so often called a misogynist.

P. 72 *Enter Ion:* it is sometimes thought that Ion does not see Creusa until near the end of his speech, *See how she weaves,* etc. But I think it more likely that he sees her as soon as he enters; and is at first too overcome with indignation to be able to address her directly.

To say nothing of my mother: it seems that he must here refer to the priestess, who is the only mother he has known.

P. 74 *I am so glad . . .:* the expression is stronger in Greek. It is the sort of moment when understatement is more effective in English.

P. 75 *The priestess stands by the temple door:* the text gives no indication of her exit; but it would be dramatically right for her to wait to see Creusa and Ion reconciled.

P. 78 *You have another father:* all of Creusa's explanation is in lyric metre; but for an English production the essential note here is intimacy: and this is almost bound to be sacrificed if verse is attempted.

P. 80 *Unless perhaps it is timely:* Ion for a moment reverts to his child-like attitude shown at the beginning of the play; then recollects how much he has learnt, and braces himself to listen with the mind of a man.

P. 81 *Apollo has done all things well:* but when she comes to enumerate these blessings, she finds the list disconcertingly short.

THE WOMEN OF TROY

P. 83 *Poseidon:* the younger brother of Zeus. *Athene:* the daughter of Zeus. Although Greeks usually referred to Trojans with some contempt for their oriental outlook – love of luxury, acceptance of despotism, and so on – yet it is assumed from Homer onwards that they had the same language, and that at least the principal gods of Hellas were also honoured in Asia.

P. 90 *Peirene:* a spring struck by the foot of Pegasus from a rock at Corinth.

P. 91 *The land of Aetna:* the complimentary reference to Sicily seems to be a protest against the Sicilian expedition, which was in progress at the time this play was produced.

P. 92 *She may be consecrated, but Agamemnon is infatuated:* it is hard to say whether this line as spoken by Talthybius sounded funny or not; but on p. 97 there is no doubt that he finds rueful amusement in the notion of Agamemnon falling for Cassandra; so the presumption is that this line too revealed his attitude. These remarks of Talthybius, and some traditional pomposity from Menelaus later on, are the only relief in the sombreness of this play, and should not be missed in performance.

P. 95 Cassandra's speeches seem to be deliberately made a mixture of pertinent sanity and ironical nonsense. Her warning of the

folly of distant military undertakings is only too plainly wise; her superficial arguments of comfort for those bereaved in war, capped by her fatuous praise of Paris's distinguished marriage, equally plainly imply the opposite of their proposed effect.

P. 98 *Avengers:* the Furies, avengers of blood, who moved Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon, and later Orestes to kill Clytemnestra.

P. 99 *Fortune is a false friend:* a more literal translation would be: 'Of those (seemingly) blessed with good fortune, call none even lucky until he is dead.'

P. 103 *As Hector's wife*, etc.: the sentences which follow here, with their didactic tone regarding the behaviour of women, are not to be regarded as merely another instance of the author's personal views dragged in on an unsuitable occasion. The topicality of Andromache's words serves a dramatic purpose in emphasizing for the audience that this woman being taken off by soldiers to be a slave and concubine is just such a one as themselves; that this is what an Athenian army did to wealthy and cultured women in Melos only two years ago.

P. 108 *This is not new to Troy ...:* these first two lines are not in the text; but as the connexion of this Ode with the theme of the play is less obvious now than then, some such explanatory introduction is probably a help in performance; perhaps also for the reader.

P. 111 For the interpretation of Helen's speech see the Introduction. *It was no minor deity ...:* the Greek text has: 'Hecabe's evil genius – whether you wish to call him Alexander or Paris.' In this speech Helen has so far used each of the two names twice; in the translation I have stuck to 'Paris' to avoid confusion. It seems that a strong significance attached to the names; if so, the explanation is lost with the first play of the trilogy.

P. 113 *Merely for recreation ...:* thus Hecabe defends the goddesses from the charge of folly. The purpose of Euripides' irony is not to encourage or to discourage belief in popular myths; it is a strictly dramatic purpose – to display vividly the character of Hecabe. She is certainly an intelligent woman – even something of a philosopher, as we have seen (p. 110); but here philosophy has given place to hatred.

P. 116 *Will our home be holy Salamis?* to an English audience this topographical speculation might seem to come more suitably from their mothers (as before, p. 90) than from the children. A producer would probably wish to close the inverted commas at *rowers ready* and in the following line change *our* to *their*.

P. 117 *She begged Neoptolemus that this child . . .:* after this the Greek text has, 'the son of your son Hector, who fell from the city walls and thus gave up his life'. This Greek repetitiveness is repugnant to the English ear, especially when, as is often the case, it emphasizes some distressing detail.

P. 118 *If we both do our best . . .:* If this seems a tactless call for co-operation, surely its purpose is to remind us that a few minutes ago Hecabe was eagerly offering co-operation to Menelaus in the judgement of Helen.

P. 121 *For what purpose have we suffered?* the interpretation of this difficult passage is made harder by a lacuna of half a line in the text. It must have been a pronouncement of some significance; and it is hard to see what other meaning it can have had than either (i) a gleam of hope in the midst of despair, or (ii) the final renunciation of all faith in the meaning of life. Professor Gilbert Murray's comment in his translation should be read; he inclines to the former view. I think the latter on the whole more probable.

HELEN

The translation of this play is based, with only occasional exceptions, on the text of Professor A. Y. Campbell.

P. 140 *Once he heard my name:* the subtle absurdity of this argument takes a few moments to work out.

P. 142 *Leave my clothes alone!:* an echo from *Hippolytus*, the scene where the Nurse clings to Hippolytus. Here the word for *clothes* is humorously inappropriate.

P. 146 *The endless chain of tedious days:* this is one of several hints that life with the phantom Helen had not satisfied every aspiration. *Speak, for my sake:* literally, 'Speak; for it is pleasant to hear of sufferings.' Menelaus means that he wants to hear the story, and explains his wish by this characteristically Euripidean generalization. *For my sake* conveys part of the sense of his

appeal while avoiding the impossibly un-English sententiousness.

P. 149 *Tell me about your adventures:* this sudden irrelevance is a parody of a similar moment in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which had probably been often criticized.

P. 159 *The gods are going to be kind:* an assurance given to the audience that the Apolline fiasco of *Iphigenia in Tauris* will not be repeated.

P. 172 *Darling of Nereus:* the ship. Nereus is a sea-god.

P. 179 *Women, I wish you joy . . .:* these last two lines are obscure. It is probable, though not certain, that Theoclymenus turns from the Dioscori to address the women of the Chorus. If Verrall's theory is correct, he addresses also the audience, telling them that they alone have seen a play in which Helen's chastity is celebrated. On the other hand, it is possible that Theoclymenus is still addressing the Dioscori, and that the meaning may be more nearly represented by: 'For her noble heart I bless you – a thing most rare in woman! Farewell!'

THE BACCHAE

P. 182 *Thyrsus:* a light stick of reed or fennel, with fresh strands of ivy twined round it. It was carried by every devotee of Dionysus; and the action of the play illustrates the supernatural power that was held to reside in it.

P. 185 *The celebrant:* Dionysus and the Chorus comprise the typical group of Bacchic worshippers, a male leader with a devoted band of women and girls. The leader *flings himself on the ground* in the climax of ecstasy, when the power of the god enters into him and he becomes possessed.

P. 190 *The ancient word for a* pledge: the translation necessarily expands the original. *Homeros* means 'pledge', and *meros* 'thigh'.

P. 191 *There is one remedy:* the prophet hints at Pentheus' approaching death.

P. 194 *Untie his hands:* the text is uncertain. A very slight alteration gives a completely different meaning: 'You are more mad than he is' – addressed to the guard and his fellows.

P. 201 *The god who makes . . .:* this is conjecturally supplied in place of a missing line.

P. 215 *Were singing holy songs:* the Greek word is *Bacchic* songs. In English this adjective is too often associated with the 'profane' drinking of wine, whereas in this play it always has a religious or at least a ritualistic meaning. In translation I have been deliberately inconsistent, using both *Bacchic* and *holy* for the sake of keeping both ideas operative.

As the curve of a wheel . . .: a difficult passage, of which no satisfactory translation can be made. An emended text gives: 'As a bow by which an untrue wheel, chiselled on a lathe, is swiftly rotated.' This would refer to the use of a bent pole or tree as a source of power.

P. 219 *And Pentheus too, Agauë?* the Chorus are physically shocked by the sight of Agauë and her prey; but their attitude does not change to pity. Agauë has been (in their view, justly) punished for her blasphemy against Dionysus, by being tricked into performing the usual Bacchic rite of slaughter, not upon the usual victim, a beast, but upon a man, and that her own son. She is now an abhorred and polluted creature, unfit for the company of the 'pure' Bacchae. Hence, though they welcome the punishment of Pentheus, their tone towards Agauë is one not of admiration but of contempt. This line in particular indicates the complete absence of pity.

Great in the eyes of the world: another hint of the 'manifestation' of the nature of the god.

P. 222 *Not yet; we came here . . .:* this and the following two lines are missing in the text, and here conjecturally supplied.

P. 223 *. . . and acknowledge the gods:* the climax of the play's irony.

. . . has shattered my whole life: after these words there is a long gap in the MS. From quotations found in ancient writers editors have collected a considerable number of fragments probably belonging to this gap; and the lines here printed are pieced together from these, in a form something like that we may expect Euripides to have used. The MS text begins again with the words, *You shall change your form to a serpent*, on p. 225.

The puzzling prophecy that follows thereafter raises too many questions to be dealt with here; see the excellent note on this passage in Professor Dodds's edition.



The next few pages
describe Greek drama available
in the Penguin Classics,
and a selection
of Pelicans

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EURIPIDES: ALCESTIS AND OTHER PLAYS

Translated by Philip Vellacott

L31

This first volume of translations of Euripides' plays contains *Alcestis*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Hippolytus*. These plays were originally written to be acted first, then read, and this translation attempts to consider impartially both the actor and the audience, both the scholar and the layman. (2s)

SOPHOCLES: ELECTRA AND OTHER PLAYS

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